

JOHN HALIFAX GENTLEMAN

MRS. CRAIK

Condensed for School Reading
by Dorothy King

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PREFACE

There are some books which, because of their deep human interest, hold a particular place in the affections of their readers. Of such is *John Halifax, Gentleman*.

When the novel was first published, over seventy years ago, it proved an immediate success, both in England and America; and it was later translated into several European languages. In the latter half of last century, when the distinctions in England between one class and another were much more strongly marked than they are to-day, it contributed its share towards influencing English social life. For the story of John Halifax helped to reveal to many in those days what in our own time is universally acknowledged—the fact that the true gentility and dignity of a man is made manifest by his life, not his rank or occupation.

Dinah Maria Mulock, afterwards Mrs. Craik, had in the year 1853 planned her novel and sketched her characters, the traits of many being drawn from life, when, during that summer, she visited Tewkesbury, and at once decided to use the town and its environs as a background for her story. So Tewkesbury and its Abbey appear as Norton Bury and the Abbey Church; whilst Longfield and Enderley are copied from places near Cheltenham and Stroud. The author found the name "John Halifax" upon a tombstone in the Abbey churchyard; and the incident of the little girl giving the poor lad a slice of bread was actually witnessed by Miss Mulock one day whilst sheltering under an archway from the rain.

The original novel is a lengthy one, therefore in this com-

pressed edition many incidents of secondary importance are of necessity omitted. But the events follow one upon another as in the original; they are told entirely in the author's words; and the interest of the story has been maintained, and the beauty of the chief character preserved, as carefully as possible in the space at command.

D. K.

John Halifax, Gentleman

CHAPTER I

"Get out o' Mr. Fletcher's road, ye idle, lounging, little——"

"Vagabond," I think the woman (Sally Watkins, once my nurse) was going to say, but she changed her mind.

My father and I both glanced round. The lad addressed turned, fixed his eyes on each of us for a moment, and made way for us. Ragged, muddy, and miserable as he was, the poor boy looked anything but a "vagabond".

"Thee need not go into the wet, my lad. Keep close to the wall, and there will be shelter enough both for us and thee," said my father, as he pulled my little hand-carriage into the alley, under cover from the pelting rain. The lad, with a grateful look, put out a hand likewise and pushed me farther in. A strong hand it was—roughened and browned with labour—though he was scarcely as old as I. What would I not have given to have been so stalwart and so tall!

The lad was strongly built; and I, poor puny wretch! so revered physical strength. Everything in him seemed to indicate that which I had not: his muscular limbs, his square, broad shoulders, his healthy cheek, though it was sharp and thin—even to his crisp curls of bright thick hair.

Thus he stood, principal figure in a picture which is even yet as clear to me as yesterday—the narrow, dirty alley leading out of the High Street, the open house-doors on either side, the children paddling in the gutter. In front the High Street, with the mayor's house opposite; and beyond, just where the rain-clouds were breaking, rose up out of a nest of trees, the tower of our ancient Abbey—Norton Bury's boast and pride.

I saw, by the restless way in which my father poked his stick into the little water-pools, that he was longing to be in his fan-yard close by. He pulled out his great silver watch.

"Twenty-three minutes lost by this shower. Phineas, my son, how am I to get thee safe home? I must find someone to go home with thee. Here, Sally—Sally Watkins! do any o' thy lads want to earn an honest penny?"

I noticed that as the lad near us heard my father's words, the colour rushed over his face, and he started forward involuntarily. I had not before perceived how wasted and hungry-looking he was.

"Sir, I want work; may I earn a penny?"

Taking off his tattered old cap, he looked right up into my father's face. The old man scanned him closely.

"What is thy name, lad?" "John Halifax."

"Where dost thee come from?" "Cornwall."

"Hast thee any parents living?" "No."

"How old might thee be, John Halifax?" "Fourteen, sir."

"Thee art used to work?" "Yes."

"What sort of work?" "Anything that I can get to do."

"Well," said my father, "thee shall take my son home, and I'll give thee a groat. Let me see—art thee a lad to be trusted?" And Abel Fletcher jingled temptingly the silver money in the pockets of his waistcoat. "Shall I give thee the groat now?"

"Not till I've earned it, sir."

So, drawing his hand back, my father slipped the money into mine, and left us. I followed him with my eyes as he went down the street. He looked precisely what he was—an honest, honourable, prosperous tradesman.

It still rained slightly, so we remained under cover. John Halifax did not attempt to talk. Once only, when the draught through the alley made me shiver, he pulled my cloak round me carefully.

"You are not very strong, I'm afraid?"

"No."

Then he stood idly, looking up at the house opposite, with its fourteen windows, one of which was open, and a cluster of little heads visible there. The mayor's children—I knew them all by sight, though nothing more; they belonged to Abbey folk and orthodoxy, I to the Society of Friends—the mayor's rosy children seemed greatly amused by watching us shivering shelterers from the rain. Just at this minute another head came

to the window, a somewhat older child; I had met her with the rest; she was only a visitor. Soon after, we saw the front door half opened, and an evident struggle taking place behind it; we even heard loud words across the narrow street.

"You shan't, Miss Ursula."

"But I will!"

And there stood the little girl, with a loaf in one hand and a carving-knife in the other. She succeeded in cutting off a large slice, and holding it out.

"Take it, poor boy!—you look so hungry. Do take it." But the servant forced her in, and the door was shut upon a sharp cry.

After a minute John Halifax crossed the street, and picked up the slice of bread. He was a long time before he ate a morsel; when he did so, it was quietly and slowly, looking very thoughtful all the while.

As soon as the rain ceased, we took our way home, he guiding my carriage along in silence.

"How strong you are!" said I, sighing, when, with a sudden pull, he had saved me from being overturned by a horseman riding past.

"Am I? Well, I shall want my strength."

"How?"

"To earn my living."

"What have you worked at lately?"

"Anything I could get, for I have never learned a trade."

"Would you like to learn one?"

He hesitated a minute, as if weighing his speech. "Once I thought I should like to be what my father was."

"What was he?"

"A scholar and a gentleman."

This was news, though it did not much surprise me. It seemed to me much more reasonable and natural that a boy like John Halifax should come of gentle than of boorish blood.

"Then, perhaps," said I, resuming the conversation, "you would not like to follow a trade?"

"Yes, I should. What would it matter to me? My father was a gentleman."

"And your mother?"

He turned suddenly round; his cheeks hot, his lips quivering: "She is dead. I do not like to hear strangers speak about my mother."

I asked his pardon. A few minutes after, I said something about wishing we were not "strangers".

"Do you?" The lad's half-amazed, half-grateful smile went right to my heart.

"Ah!" I cried, eagerly, when we left the shade of the Abbey trees, and crossed the street; "here we are, at home!"

"Are you?" The homeless lad just glanced at it—the flight of stone steps which led to my father's respectable and handsome door. "Good-day, then—which means good-bye."

"Not good-bye just yet!" said I, trying painfully to disengage myself from my little carriage and mount the steps. John Halifax came to my aid.

"Suppose you let me carry you. I could—and—and it would be great fun, you know."

I put my arms round his neck; he lifted me safely and carefully, and set me at my own door.

"Is there anything more I can do for you, sir?"

"Don't call me 'sir'; I am only a boy like yourself. I want you; don't go yet. Ah! here comes my father!"

John Halifax stood aside, and touched his cap.

"So here thee be—hast thou taken care of my son? Did he give thee thy groat, my lad?"

We had neither of us once thought of the money. When I acknowledged this my father laughed. John Halifax for the third time was going away.

"Stop, lad—I forget thy name—here is thy groat, and a shilling added, for being kind to my son."

"Thank you, but I don't want payment for kindness." He kept the groat, and put back the shilling into my father's hand.

"Eh!" said the old man, "thee'rt an odd lad. Come in to dinner, Phineas. I say," turning back to John Halifax, "art thee hungry?"

"Very hungry." Great tears came into the poor lad's eyes. "Nearly starving."

"Bless me! then get in, and have thy dinner. But first—thee art a decent lad, come of decent parents?"

"Yes," almost indignantly.

"Thee hast never been in gaol?"

"No!" thundered out the lad, with a furious look. "I don't want your dinner, sir; I would have stayed, because your son asked me, and he was civil to me, and I liked him. Now I think I had better go. Good-day, sir."

There is a verse in a very old Book which runs thus:—

"And it came to pass when he had made an end of speaking unto Saul, that the soul of Jonathan was knit unto the soul of David; and Jonathan loved him as his own soul."

And this day, I, a poorer and more helpless Jonathan, had found my David. I caught him by the hand, and would not let him go.

"There, get in, lads—make no more ado," said Abel Fletcher sharply, as he disappeared.

My father and I took our dinner in the large parlour. I dared not bring the poor lad into this, my father's especial domain; but as soon as he was away in the tan-yard I sent for John. Jael brought him in; Jael, the only womankind we ever had about us. John Halifax came to my easy-chair, and asked me how I felt, and if he could do anything for me before he went away.

"You'll not go away; not till my father comes home, at least?"

My entreaty, "You'll not go away?" was so earnest that it apparently touched the friendless boy to the core.

"Thank you," he said, in an unsteady voice; "you are very kind; I'll stay an hour or so, if you wish it."

"Then come and sit down here, and let us have a talk."

"Can you read?" he asked me suddenly.

"I should rather think so."

"And write?" "Oh, yes; certainly."

"I can't write," he said, "and I don't know when I shall be able to learn; I wish you would put down something in a book for me."

"That I will."

He took out of his pocket a little case of leather, with an under one of black silk; within this, again, was a book. He would not let it go out of his hands, but held it so that I could see the leaves. It was a Greek Testament. He pointed to the fly-leaf, and I read:

"Guy Halifax, his Book."

"Guy Halifax, gentleman, married Muriel Joyce, spinster, May 17, in the year of our Lord, 1779."

"John Halifax, their son, born June 18th, 1780."

There was one more entry, in a feeble illiterate female hand:

"Guy Halifax, died January 4, 1781."

"What shall I write, John?" said I.

"Write—*Muriel Halifax, died January 1st, 1791.*"

"Nothing more?"

"Nothing more."

He looked at the writing for a minute or two, dried it carefully by the fire, replaced the book in its two cases, and put it into his pocket. He said no other word but "Thank you", and I asked him no questions. This was all I ever heard of the boy's parentage: nor do I believe he knew more himself.

Jael kept coming in and out of the parlour on divers excuses, eyeing very suspiciously John Halifax and me.

"Phineas! thee ought to be out."

"I have been out, thank you, Jael." And John and I went on talking.

"Phineas! it's time this lad were going about his own business."

"Hush!—nonsense, Jael."

"No—she's right," said John Halifax. "I've had a merry day—thank you kindly for it! and now I'll be gone."

"Why do you want to go? You have no work?"

"No; I wish I had. But I'll get some."

"How?"

"Just by trying everything that comes to hand."

"Come into the garden." I began looking for my crutches. John found and put them into my hand. I hobbled past him; he following to the garden door. There I paused—tired out. John Halifax took gentle hold of my shoulder.

"I think, if you did not mind, I'm sure I could carry you. I carried a meal-sack once, weighing eight stone."

I burst out laughing, and forthwith consented to assume the place of the meal-sack.

"Please take me to that clematis arbour; it looks over the Avon. Now, how do you like our garden?"

"It's a *very* nice place."

Certainly it was. A large square, chiefly grass, level as a bowling-green, with borders round. Above that, the high wall, the yew-hedge, and the river.

"This is a very pretty view."

Ay, so I had always thought it. At the end of the arbour the wall which enclosed us on the riverward side was cut down—my father had done it at my asking—so as to make a seat. Thence, one could see a goodly sweep of country. First, close below, flowed the Avon. From the opposite bank stretched a wide green level, called the Ham. Beyond it was a second

river, forming an arch of a circle round the verdant flat.

"It is the Severn."

"Ah," cried John, "I like the Severn."

I showed him where, beyond our garden-wall, rose up the grim old Abbey tower.

"Probably this garden belonged to the Abbey in ancient time—our orchard is so fine. The monks may have planted it."

"Oh!" he evidently did not comprehend, but was trying, without asking, to find out what I referred to.

"The monks were parsons, John, you know."

"Oh, indeed. Do you think they planted that yew-hedge?"

Now, far and near, our yew-hedge was noted. It was about fifteen feet high, and as many thick. John poked in and about it—leaning his breast against the solid depth of branches; but their close shield resisted all his strength. At last he came back.

"What were you about? Did you want to get through?"

"I wanted just to see if it were possible."

I shook my head. "What would you do, John, if you were shut up here, and had to get over the yew-hedge? You could not climb it?"

"I know that. I'll tell you what I'd do—I'd begin and break it, twig by twig, till I forced my way through, and got out safe at the other side."

"Well done, lad! but if it's all the same to thee, I would rather thee did not try that experiment upon *my* hedge at present."

My father had come behind, and overheard us, unobserved. A grim kindliness of aspect showed that he was not displeased—nay, even amused.

Abel Fletcher sat down on the bench; then, leaning on his stick, eyed John Halifax sharply, all over, from top to toe.

"Didn't thee say thee wanted work? What work canst thee do, lad?"

"Anything," was the eager answer.

"Anything generally means nothing," sharply said my father; "what hast thee been at all this year? The truth, mind!"

John's eyes flashed, but he said quietly, "Let me think a minute, and I'll tell you. All spring I was at a farmer's, riding the plough-horses, hoeing turnips; then I went up the hills with some sheep; in June I tried haymaking, and caught a fever—you needn't start, sir, I've been well these six weeks, or I wouldn't have come near your son—then——"

"That will do, lad—I'm satisfied."

I looked gratefully and hopefully at my father—but his next words rather modified my pleasure.

"Phineas, one of my men at the tan-yard has gone and listed this day. Dost thee think this lad is fit to take the place?"

"Whose place, father?"

"Bill Watkins'."

I was dumbfounded! I had occasionally seen the said Bill Watkins, whose business it was to collect the skins which my father bought from the farmers round about. A distinct vision presented itself to me of Bill and his cart. The idea of John Halifax in such a position was not agreeable.

"But, father—isn't there anything else?"

"I have nothing else, or if I had I wouldn't give it. He that will not work neither shall he eat."

5 // "I will work," said John sturdily. "I don't care what it is, if only it's honest work."

Abel Fletcher was mollified. He addressed himself to John.

"Canst thee drive?"

"That I can!" and his eyes brightened with boyish delight.

"Tut! it's only a cart—the cart with the skins. Dost thee know anything of tanning?"

"No, but I can learn."

After a few minutes more, Abel Fletcher said, not unkindly:

"Well, I'll take thee; though it isn't often I take a lad without a character of some sort—I suppose thee hast none?"

4 // "None," was the answer, while the straightforward, steady gaze which accompanied it unconsciously contradicted the statement; his own honest face was the lad's best witness—at all events I thought so.

Having settled the question of wages, which John Halifax did not debate at all, my father left us, but turned back when half-way across the green-turfed square.

"Thee said thee had no money; there's a week in advance, my son being witness I pay it thee; and I can pay thee a shilling less every Saturday till we get straight."

"Very well, sir; good afternoon, and thank you."

John took off his cap as he spoke—Abel Fletcher, involuntarily almost, touched his hat in return of the salutation. Then he walked away, and we had the garden all to ourselves—we, Jonathan and his new-found David.

CHAPTER II

After this first day, many days came and went before I again saw John Halifax—almost before I again thought of him. For it was one of my seasons of excessive pain; when I found it difficult to think of anything. Afterwards, as my pain abated, I wondered if John had ever asked for me. At length I put the question.

Jael "thought he had—but wasn't sure. Didn't bother her head about such folk".

At last I broke the bonds of sickness, and plunged into the outer world again. It was one market-day—Jael being absent—that I came downstairs. A soft, bright, autumn morning, mild as spring, coaxing a wandering robin to come and sing to me. I opened the window to hear him, and amused myself with watching a spot of scarlet winding down the rural road. It turned out to be the cloak of a well-to-do young farmer's wife riding to market in her cart beside her jolly-looking spouse.

Behind the farmer's cart came another. I watched the two carts, the second of which was with difficulty passing the farmer's, on the opposite side of the narrow road. At last it succeeded in getting in advance, to the young woman's evident annoyance, until the driver, turning, lifted his hat to her with such a merry, frank, pleasant smile. Surely, I knew that smile.

"John! John!" I called out, but he did not hear. I leaned out, watching him approach our house; watching him with so great pleasure that I forgot to wonder whether or no he would notice me. He did not at first, being busy over his horse; until, just as he was passing by he looked up. A beaming smile of surprise and pleasure, a friendly nod, then all at once his manner changed; he took off his cap and bowed ceremoniously to his master's son. Having made his salutation, he was driving on, when I called after him.

"John! John!"

"Yes, sir. I am so glad you're better again."

"Stop one minute till I come out to you." And I crawled to the front door, forgetting everything but the pleasure of meeting him. I opened the door. "John, where are you?"

"Here; did you want me?"

"Yes. Come up here; never mind the cart."

John settled the horse under a tree. Then he bounded back, and was up the steps to my side in a single leap.

"I had no notion of seeing you. They said you were in bed yesterday." (Then he *had* been inquiring for me!) "Ought you to be standing at the door this cold day?"

"It's quite warm," I said, looking up at the sunshine, and shivering.

"Please go in."

"If you'll come too."

He nodded, then put his arm round mine, and helped me in.

"I'm glad you're better," he said, and said no more.

"And how have you been, John? How do you like the tan-yard? Tell me frankly."

He pulled a wry face, though comical withal, and said cheerily, "Everybody must like what brings them their daily bread. It's a grand thing not to have been hungry for nearly thirty days."

"Poor John! I have so often wanted to see you. Couldn't you come in now?"

He shook his head, and pointed to the cart.

"Are you going to the tan-yard?"

"Yes—for the rest of the day."

"I'll come and see you there this afternoon."

"No?" with a look of delighted surprise. "But you must not—you ought not."

"But *I will!*" And I laughed to hear myself actually using that phrase. What would Jael have said?

When my father came home he found me waiting in my place at table. He only said, "Thee art better then, my son?" But I knew how glad he was to see me. He gave token of this by being remarkably conversible over our meal. His conversation had reference to an anecdote Dr. Jessop had just been telling him—about a little girl, one of our doctor's patients, who in some passionate struggle had hurt herself very much with a knife.

"Poor thing!" said I, absently.

"No need to pity her; her spirit is not half broken yet. Thomas Jessop said to me, 'That little Ursula——'"

"Is her name Ursula?" And I called to mind the little girl who had tried to give some bread to the hungry John Halifax, and whose cry of pain we heard as the door shut upon her.

"Father," said I, when he had ceased talking, "I should

like to go with thee to the tan-yard this afternoon, if thou wilt take me."

He looked pleased, as he always did when I used the Friends' mode of phraseology—for I had not been brought up in the Society; this having been the last request of my mother, rigidly observed by her husband.

"Phineas, my son," said he, "I rejoice to see thy mind turning towards business. I trust, should better health be vouchsafed thee, that some day soon——"

"Not just yet, father," said I sadly—for I held the tan-yard in abhorrence.

It hurt me a little that my project of going with him to-day should in any way have deceived him; and rather silently we set out together; my father marching along in his grave fashion, I steering my little carriage, and keeping as close as I could beside him. It was warm in the sunshine, and very pleasant looked the streets, even the close, narrow streets of Norton Bury.

My father's tan-yard was in an alley. Among the workmen, as we entered, I looked round for the lad I knew. He was sitting in a corner in one of the sheds, helping two or three women to split bark, very busy at work. As we passed, John did not even see us. I asked my father, in a whisper, how he liked the boy.

"What boy?—Eh, him?—Oh, well enough—there's no harm in him that I know of. Dost thee want him to wheel thee about the yard? Here, I say, lad—bless me! I've forgot thy name."

John Halifax started up at the sharp tone of command; but when he saw me he smiled. My father walked on; I stayed behind.

"John, I want you."

John shook himself free of the bark-heap, and came.

"Anything I can do for you, sir?"

"Don't call me 'sir'; if I say 'John', why don't you say 'Phineas'?"

He guided me carefully among the tan-pits until we reached the lower end of the yard. It was bounded by the Avon only, and by a great heap of refuse bark.

"This is not a bad place to rest in; if you liked to get out of the carriage I'd make you comfortable here in no time."

I was quite willing, so he ran off and fetched an old horse-rug, which he laid upon the soft, dry mass. Then he helped me thither, and covered me with my cloak.

"Are you comfortable, Phineas?"

"Very, if you would come and sit down, too."

"That I will. Are you cold? I haven't anything fit to wrap you in, except this rug."

He muffled it closer round me; infinitely light and tender was his rough-looking boy's hand.

"I never saw anybody so thin as you; thinner much since I saw you. Have you been very ill, Phineas? What ailed you?"

His anxiety was so earnest, that I explained to him that from my birth I had been puny, that my life had been a succession of sicknesses, and that I could hope for little else until the end.

"But don't think I mind it, John. I am very content; I have a quiet home, a good father, and now I think and believe I have found the only thing I wanted—a good friend."

He smiled, but I saw he did not understand me.

"Come," said I, changing the conversation, "we have had enough of me; how goes the world with you? Have you taken kindly to the tan-yard? Answer frankly."

He looked at me hard, put both his hands in his pockets, and began to whistle a tune.

"Don't shirk the question, please, John. I want to know the real truth."

"Well, then, I hate the tan-yard. But, Phineas, don't imagine I intend to hate it always. I intend to get used to it. And don't think that I'm not thankful to your good father for giving me a lift in the world—the first I ever really had. If I get one foot on the ladder, perhaps I may climb."

"Suppose, after Dick Whittington's fashion, you succeeded to your master's business, should you like to be a tanner?"

He paused—his truthful face betraying him. Then he said resolutely, "I would like to be anything that was honest and honourable. It's a notion of mine, that whatever a man may be, his trade does not make him—he makes his trade."

The afternoon had waned during our talk; but I was very loth to part with my friend. Suddenly, I thought of asking where his home was.

"How do you mean?"

"Where do you live? where do you take your meals and sleep?"

"Generally I eat my dinner as I go along the road. Supper, when I do get it, I like best on this bark-heap, after the men

are away, and the tan-yard's clear. Your father lets me stay."

"And where is your lodging, then? Where do you sleep?"

"Anywhere I can. Generally, here."

"Oh, John! But isn't it very cold?"

"No—not often. I scoop out a snug little nest in the bark, and curl up in it like a dormouse, wrapped in this rug, which one of the men gave me. Besides, every morning early I take a plunge in the stream, and that makes me warm all day."

"What shall you do when winter comes?"

John looked grave. "I don't know: I suppose I shall manage somehow—like the sparrows," he answered, perceiving not how apposite his illustration was. For truly he seemed as destitute as the birds of the air, whom ONE feedeth, when they cry to Him.

At last I said, "John, do you remember the woman who spoke so sharply to you in the alley that day?"

"Yes. I shall never forget anything which happened that day," he answered softly.

"Sally was my nurse once. Her biggest boy, Bill, used to drive your cart. She is poor—not so very poor, though. Twopence a night would help her; and I dare say, if you'll let me speak to her, you might have Bill's attic all to yourself. It's worth trying for."

"It is indeed. You are very kind, Phineas."

I persuaded John to go at once with me to Sally Watkins. She consented to his lodging with her—though she looked up with an odd stare when I said he was "a friend" of mine. So we settled our business, first all together, then Sally and I alone, while John went up to look at his room. I knew I could trust Sally, whom I was glad enough to help, poor woman! She promised to make him extra comfortable, and keep my secret too. When John came down she was quite civil to him—even friendly.

Before we left I wanted to see his room; he carried me up, and we both sat down on the bed. The attic was very low and small, yet John gazed about it with an air of proud possession.

"Do you like your 'castle', John?" said I; "will it suit you?"

"I rather think it will!" he cried in hearty delight. And my heart likewise was very glad.

Winter came early and sudden that year. I never stirred

from my room, and never saw anybody but my father, Dr. Jessop, and Jael. At last I took courage to say to the former that I wished he would send John Halifax up some day.

"What does thee want the lad for?"

"Only to see him."

"Pshaw! a lad out o' the tan-yard is not fit company for thee. Let him alone."

I did not discuss the matter. Only at every possible opportunity I managed to send John a little note, written carefully in printed letters, for I knew he could read that; also a book or two, out of which he might teach himself a little more.

One February day, when the frost had at last broken up, I crawled down into the parlour, and out of the parlour into the garden. I amused myself by watching a pale line of snowdrops which had come up one by one, like prisoners of war to their execution. But the next minute I felt ashamed of the heartless simile, for it reminded me of poor Bill Watkins, who, taken after the battle of Mentz, last December, had been shot by the French as a spy.

"Have you been to see Sally lately?" said I, to Jael, who was cutting winter cabbages; "is she getting over her trouble?"

"She bean't rich, to afford fretting. There's Jem and three little 'uns yet to feed, to say nought of another big lad as lives there, and eats a deal more than he pays, I'm sure."

I took the insinuation quietly, for I knew that my father had lately raised John's wages, and he his rent to Sally.

"Look at that young gentleman coming down the garden; and here I be in my dirty gown, and my apron full o' cabbages." And she dropped the vegetables all over the path as the "gentleman" came towards us.

I smiled—for, in spite of his transformation, I, at least, had no difficulty in recognizing John Halifax.

He had on new clothes—neat, decent, and plain, such as any 'prentice lad might wear. Easily might Jael or anyone else have "mistaken" him, as she cuttingly said, for a young gentleman.

"What may be thy business here?" she said roughly.

"Abel Fletcher sent me, that I might go out with Phineas."

Jael retired discomfited, and again dropped half of her cabbages. John picked them up and restored them; but got for thanks only a parting thrust.

"Thee art mighty civil in thy new clothes. I say, don't thee

be leaving the cart o' skins again under the parlour windows."

"I don't drive the cart now," was all he replied.

"Not drive the cart?" I asked eagerly, when Jael had*disappeared.

"Only, that this winter I've managed to teach myself to read and add up, out of your books, you know; and your father found it out, and he says I shall go round collecting money instead of skins, and it's much better wages, and—I like it better—that's all."

"He must trust you very much, John," said I, knowing how exceedingly particular my father was in his collectors.

"That's it—that's what pleases me so. He is very good to me, Phineas, and he gave me a special holiday, that I might go out with you. Isn't that grand?"

"Grand, indeed. What fun we'll have!"

"Where shall we go?" said he, when he was guiding my carriage down Norton Bury streets.

"I think to the Mythe." The Mythe was a little hill on the outskirts of the town, breezy and fresh.

"Ay, that will do; and as we go you will see the floods out. How high are the floods here generally, Phineas?"

"I can't remember. But don't look so serious. Let us enjoy ourselves. Tell me what you have been doing all winter."

It was a brief and simple chronicle—of hard work, all day over, and from the Monday to the Saturday.

"But how did you teach yourself to read and add up?"

"Generally at odd minutes going along the road. Then I had Sunday afternoons besides."

"What books have you got through?"

"All you sent—*Pilgrim's Progress*, *Robinson Crusoe*, and *The Arabian Nights*. Also the one you gave me at Christmas. I have read it a good deal."

I liked to hear him own—nor be ashamed to own—that he read "a good deal" in that rare book for a boy to read—the Bible.

"And can you read quite easily now, John?"

"Pretty well, considering. But I ought to learn; I must learn."

"You shall. It's little I can teach; but, if you like, I'll teach you all I know."

We reached the Mythe. "David," I said (I had got into a habit of calling him "David"; and now he had read a certain

history in that Book, I supposed he had guessed why, for he liked the name), "I don't think I can go any farther up the hill."

"Oh! but you shall! I'll push behind; and when we come to the stile I'll carry you. It's lovely on the top of the Mythe—look at the sunset. You cannot have seen a sunset for ever so long."

Ere long we stood on the top of the steep mound. Close below it, at the foot of a precipitous slope, ran the Severn.

"What is that?" John cried suddenly, pointing to a mass of water, three or four feet high, which came surging along the mid-stream, upright as a wall.

"It is the egre; I've often seen it on Severn. We call it the river-bore."

"But it is only a big wave."

"Big enough to swamp a boat, though."

And while I spoke, I saw, to my horror, that there actually was a boat, with two men in it, trying to get out of the way of the egre. John had already slipped from my side, and swung himself down the steep slope to the water's edge.

The egre travelled slowly in its passage, changing the smooth river to a whirl of conflicting currents, in which no boat could live—least of all that light pleasure-boat. In it was a youth I knew by sight, Mr. Brithwood of the Mythe House, and another gentleman. They both pulled hard—they got out of the mid-stream, but not close enough to land.

"Hold there!" shouted John at the top of his voice; "throw that rope out and I will pull you in!"

It was a hard tug; but he succeeded. Both gentlemen leaped safe on shore. The younger tried desperately to save his boat, but it was too late. Already the "water-bore" had clutched it.

"So it's all over with her, poor thing!"

"Who cares?—we might have lost our lives," sharply said the other, an older and sickly-looking gentleman. They both scrambled up the Mythe, without noticing John Halifax; then the elder turned.

"But who pulled us ashore? Was it you, my young friend?"

John Halifax, emptying his soaked boots, answered, "I suppose so."

"Indeed, we owe you much."

"I know him, Cousin March," said young Brithwood. "He works in Fletcher the Quaker's tan-yard."

"Impossible!" cried Mr. March. "Young man, will you tell me to whom I am so much obliged?"

"My name is John Halifax."

"Yes; but *what* are you?"

"What he said. Mr. Brithwood knows me well enough; I work in the tan-yard."

"My good fellow," said the sickly gentleman, "I won't forget your bravery. If I could do anything for you—and meanwhile, if a trifle like this," and he slipped something into John's hand.

John returned it with a bow, merely saying that he would rather not take any money.

The gentleman turned away, and turned back again. "My name is March—Henry March; if you should ever——"

"Thank you, sir. Good day."

Mr. March walked on, following young Brithwood. They disappeared.

"I'm glad they're gone: now we can be comfortable." John flung himself down. I sat and watched him making idle circles in the sandy path with the rose-switch he had cut.

A thought struck me. "John, hand me the stick, and I'll give you your first writing lesson."

So there, on the smooth gravel, and with the rose-stem for a pen, I taught him how to form the letters of the alphabet and join them together. He learned them very quickly.

"Bravo!" he cried, as we turned homeward, "I have gained something to-day!"

Crossing the bridge over the Avon, we stood once more to look at the waters that were "out". They had risen considerably.

"I don't quite like this," said John, as his quick eye swept down the course of the river. "Did you ever see the waters thus high before?"

"Yes, I believe I have; nobody minds it at Norton Bury; it is only the sudden thaw, my father says, and he ought to know, for he has had plenty of experience, the tan-yard being so close to the river."

"I was thinking of that; but come, it's getting cold."

He took me safe home, and we parted cordially—nay, affectionately—at my own door.

My father came in late that evening; he looked tired and uneasy. In the middle of the night there was a knocking at

our hall-door. I slept on the ground-flat, in a little room opposite the parlour. Ere I could well collect my thoughts I saw my father pass, fully dressed, with a light in his hand. The knocking grew louder, as if the person had no time to hesitate at making a noise.

"Who's there?" called out my father; and at the answer he opened the front door, first shutting mine.

A minute afterwards I heard someone in my room. "Phineas, are you here? Don't be frightened."

I was not—as soon as John's voice reached me. "It's something about the tan-yard?"

"Yes, the waters are rising, and I have come to fetch your father; he may save a good deal yet. Now, Phineas, lie you down again. I'll see after your father."

They went out of the house together, and did not return the whole night.

That night was one long remembered at Norton Bury. Bridges were destroyed—boats carried away—houses inundated. The loss of life was small, but that of property was great. Six hours did the work of ruin, and then the flood began to turn.

It was a long waiting until they came home—my father and John. At daybreak I saw them standing on the doorstep. A blessed sight!

"Oh, father! my dear father!" and I drew him in, holding fast his hands. He did not repel me.

"Father, tell me what has befallen thee?"

"Nothing, my son, save that the Giver of all worldly goods has seen fit to take back a portion of mine. I, like many another in this town, am poorer by some thousands than I went to bed last night."

"Father, never mind; it might have been worse."

"Of a surety. I should have lost everything I had in the world—save for—where is the lad? What art thee standing outside for? Come in, John, and shut the door."

John obeyed. He was cold and wet. I wanted him to sit down by the fireside.

"Ay, do, lad!" said my father, kindly. John came.

"Jael," cried my father, "give us some breakfast, the lad and me—we have had a hard night's work together."

And so, to my great joy, John Halifax was bidden, and sat down to the same board as his master.

After breakfast my father explained to me all his losses;

and how, but for the timely warning he had received, the flood might have nearly ruined him.

"Ay, the lad has been useful: it is an old head on young shoulders."

John looked very proud of this praise; but directly after it some suspicious thought seemed to come into Abel Fletcher's mind.

"Lad," suddenly turning round on John Halifax, "thee told me thee saw the river rising by the light of the moon. What was *thee* doing then, out o' thy honest bed and thy quiet sleep, at eleven o'clock at night?"

John coloured violently. "I was doing no harm. I was in the tan-yard with the men—they were watching, and had a candle; and I wanted to sit up, and had no light."

"What didst thee want to sit up for?"

"Sir, I'll tell you; it's no disgrace. Though I'm such a big fellow I can't write; and your son was good enough to try and teach me. I was afraid of forgetting the letters; so I tried to make them all over again, with a bit of chalk, on the bark-shed wall. It did nobody any harm that I know of."

The boy's tone, even though it was rather quick and angry, won no reproof. At last my father said, gently enough:

"Is that all, lad?"

"Yes."

"John Halifax, thee hast been of great service to me this night. What reward shall I give thee?"

And instinctively his hand dived down into his pocket. John turned away.

"Thank you—I'd rather not. It is enough reward that I have been useful to my master, and that he acknowledges it."

My father thought a minute, and then offered his hand. "Thee'rt in the right, lad. I am very much obliged to thee, and I will not forget it."

And John went away, looking as proud as an emperor.

"Is there nothing thou canst think of, Phineas, that would please the lad?" said my father, after we had been talking some time.

I made the suggestion that he should spend every Sunday at our house. So after that John Halifax came to us every Sunday; and for one day of the week, at least, was received in his master's house as our equal and my friend.

CHAPTER III

Summers and winters slipped by lazily enough, as the years seemed always to crawl round at Norton Bury. We two, John Halifax and Phineas Fletcher, lived our lives—the one so active and busy, the other so useless and dull.

One June morning he and I sat in our long-familiar summer seat, the clematis arbour by the garden wall. I sat looking down into the river, which flowed on, as my years were flowing, monotonous, dark, and slow, as they must flow on for ever. John asked me what I was thinking of.

"Of myself: what a fine specimen of the noble *genus homo* I am."

I spoke bitterly, but John knew how to meet that mood.

"Phineas, here goes for a catalogue of your qualities."

"John, don't be foolish."

"I will, if I like; though perhaps not quite so foolish as some other people; so listen: height, full five feet four; a stature historically appertaining to great men; of a slight, delicate person, but not lame as once was."

"No, thank God!"

"Thin, rather——"

"Very—a mere skeleton! Now let me turn the tables. How tall are *you*, John?"

"Five feet eleven inches and a half." And, rising, he exhibited to its full advantage that very creditable altitude.

"Ah! David, you are quite a young man now."

He smiled. "I am glad I look old for my years," said he.

"It tells well in the tan-yard. People would be slow to trust a clerk who looked a mere boy. Still, your father trusts me."

"He does, indeed. Only yesterday he said that now he was no longer dissatisfied with your working at all sorts of studies, in leisure hours, since it made you none the worse man of business. How I wish you were something better than a clerk in a tan-yard. I have a plan, John."

But what that plan was, was fated to remain unrevealed. Jael came to us in the garden, to summon me to an interview with my father and Dr. Jessop. I caught her parting mutterings, as she marched behind me: "Kill or cure, indeed!"—"No more fit than a baby!"—"Abel Fletcher be clean mad!"—"Hope Thomas Jessop will speak out plain and tell him so!",

and the like. From these I guessed what was looming in the distance—a future which my father constantly held *in terrorem* over me, though successive illness had kept it in abeyance. Alas! I knew that my poor father's hopes and plans were vain! I went into his presence with a heavy heart.

There is no need to detail that interview. Enough, that after it he set aside for ever his last lingering hope of having a son able to assist, and finally succeed him in his business, and that I set aside every dream of growing up to be a help and comfort to my father.

The year 1800 was long known in English households as "the dear year". A terrible time that was—War, Famine, and Tumult stalking hand-in-hand, and no one to stay them. These troubles, which were everywhere abroad, reached us even in our quiet town of Norton Bury. Though I had to bear so much bodily suffering that I was seldom told of any worldly cares, still I often fancied things were going ill both within and without our doors. Jael complained in an under-key of stinted housekeeping, or boasted aloud of her own ingenuity in making ends meet: and my father's brow grew continually heavier, graver, sterner.

John Halifax still remained my father's clerk—nay, he was even advancing in duties and trusts, being sent long journeys up and down England to buy grain—Abel Fletcher having added to his tanning business the flour-mill hard by.

Summer was passing. People began to watch with anxious looks the thin harvest-fields—as Jael often told me, when she came home from her walks. "It was piteous to see them," she said; "only July, and the quartern loaf nearly three shillings, and meal four shillings a peck." Then she would glance at our flour-mill, where my father kept his grain locked up, waiting for what, he wisely judged, might be a worse harvest than the last.

On the 1st of August I began to see that things were going wrong. Abel Fletcher sat at dinner wearing the heavy, hard look which had grown upon his face, not unmingled with the wrinkles planted by physical pain. For he could not quite keep down his hereditary enemy, gout; and this week it had clutched him pretty hard.

Dr. Jessop came in, and I stole away, and sat for an hour in the garden. After the doctor left, my father sent for me and all his housenold. He first addressed Jael. "Woman, was it thee who cooked the dinner to-day?"

She gave a dignified affirmative.

"Thee must give us no more such dinners. No cakes, no pastry kickshaws, and only wheaten bread enough for absolute necessity. Our neighbours shall not say that Abel Fletcher has flour in his mill, and plenty in his house, while there is famine abroad in the land. So take heed."

"I do take heed," answered Jael staunchly. "Preach not to others while the poor folk be starving in scores about Norton Bury, and the rich folk there will not sell their wheat under famine price. Take heed to thyself, Abel Fletcher."

My father winced, either from a twinge of gout or conscience; and then Jael suddenly ceased the attack, sent the other servants out of the room, and tended her master as carefully as if she had not insulted him. He had a long fit of pain, which left him considerably exhausted. When, being at last relieved, he and I were sitting in the room alone, he said to me:

"Phineas, the tan-yard has thriven ill of late, and I thought the mill would make up for it. But if it will not it will not. Wouldst thee mind, my son, being left a little poorer when I am gone?"

"Father!"

"Well, then, in a few days I will begin selling my wheat, as that lad has advised me to do these weeks past. He is a sharp lad, John Halifax, and I am getting old. Perhaps he is right."

On the Monday morning my father went to the tan-yard as usual. At dinner-time I rose, went downstairs, and waited for him; waited one, two, three hours. It was very strange. After some consideration I despatched Jem Watkins to the tan-yard to see after his master. Jem Watkins had somehow crept into our household as errand boy.

He came back with ill news. There was a bread-riot in the town. God only knows how terrible those "riots" were; when the people rose in desperation to get food for themselves, their wives, and children.

The riot here was scarcely universal. Norton Bury was not a large place, and Jem said it was chiefly about our mill and our tan-yard that the disturbance lay.

"And where is my father?" Jem "didn't know".

"Jael, somebody must go at once, and find my father."

"I am going," said Jael. Of course, I went too.

The tan-yard was deserted; the mob had divided, and gone, one half to our mill, the rest to another that was lower down

the river. I asked of a poor frightened bark-cutter if she knew where my father was? She thought he was gone for the "millingtary"; but Mr. Halifax was at the mill now. I did not know John had come already to be called "Mr. Halifax".

There was nothing for me but to wait here till my father returned. What a half-hour it was! At last I heard a footstep crossing the yard.

"Phineas!"

"John!"

He let go my hands, saying hurriedly—

"Where is your father?"

"I wish I knew!—Gone for the soldiers, they say."

"No—he would never do that. I must go and look for him. Good-bye." And he was gone.

In a few minutes I saw him and my father enter the tan-yard together. He was talking earnestly, and my father was listening. But whatever the argument was, it failed to move him. I went to meet him.

"Phineas," said John anxiously, "come and help me to persuade your father to save his property. He will not call for the aid of the law, because he is a Friend. But he might get his own men to defend his property, and need not do what he is bent on doing—go to the mill himself."

I caught his arm. "Father, don't go."

"My son," said he, turning on me one of his "iron looks", "my son, no opposition. Any who try that with me fail. If those fellows had waited two days more I would have sold all my wheat at a hundred shillings the quarter; now they shall have nothing. Get thee safe home, Phineas, my son; Jael, go thou likewise."

But neither went. John held me back as I was following my father.

"He will do it, Phineas. Please God, I'll take care no harm touches him—but you go home."

That was not to be thought of. He followed my father and I followed him. For Jael, she disappeared.

There was a private path from the tan-yard to the mill, along the river-side; by this we went, in silence. When we reached the spot it was deserted; but farther down the river we saw a number of men breaking down our garden wall.

"They think he is gone home," whispered John; "we'll get in here the safer. Quick, Phineas."

We crossed the little bridge; John took a key out of his pocket, and let us into the mill by a small door—the only entrance, and that was barred and trebly barred within. The mill was a queer, musty place, especially the machinery room. We stood there a good while—it was the safest place, having no windows. Then we followed my father to the top story, where he kept his bags of grain. But while Abel Fletcher counted his bags, worth almost as much as bags of gold—we heard a hammering at the door below. The rioters were come. Small as their force seemed, there was something at once formidable and pitiful in the howl that reached us.

"Bring out the bags! Us mun have bread!"

"Throw down thy corn, Abel Fletcher!"

"Abel Fletcher *will* throw it down to ye, ye knaves," said my father, leaning out of the upper window.

"That is well," exclaimed John eagerly. "Thank you, Mr. Fletcher—I knew you would yield at last."

"Didst thee, lad?" said my father, stopping short.

"Not because they forced you—not to save your life—but because it was right."

"Help me with this bag," was all the reply. John hauled it up.

"Now, open the window."

"But if I do, the bag will fall into the river. You cannot—oh, no! you cannot mean that!"

"Haul it up to the window, John Halifax."

But John remained immovable.

"I must do it myself, then;" and, in the desperate effort he made, somehow the bag of grain fell on his lame foot. Tortured into frenzy with the pain, his failing strength seemed doubled and trebled. In an instant more he had got the bag half through the window, and the next sound we heard was its heavy splash in the river below.

A howl of fury and despair arose. A sharp substance in the river's bed had cut the bag, and the wheat had soon all disappeared, except what remained in the bag when it was drawn on shore. Over even that the men fought like demons.

Abel Fletcher sat on his remaining bags in an exhaustion that I think was not all physical pain. The paroxysm of anger past, he seemed subdued, even to something like remorse.

John looked at him. "Sir, you must come now. Not a second to lose—they will fire the mill next."

"Let them."

"Let them—and Phineas is here!"

My poor father! He rose at once.

We got him downstairs—he was very lame. The door was hid from the opposite shore, where the rioters had now collected. In a minute we had crept forth, and dashed out of sight.

"Home?" said my father, as John led him passively along.

"No, sir, not home: they are there before you. You must hide for a time—both of you. Come to my room. You will be secure there."

Sally Watkins knew not of our entrance; she was out, watching the rioters. No one saw us but Jem, and Jem's honour was safe as a rock.

"Now," said John, hastily smoothing his bed, so that my father might lie down, "you will likely have to spend the night here. Jem shall bring you a light and supper. You will make yourself easy, Abel Fletcher? And Phineas—you will take care of yourself. Now good-bye—I must be off."

"Whither?" said my father, rousing himself.

"To try and save the house and the tan-yard—I fear we must give up the mill. There! see after your father, Phineas. I shall come back in good time."

The evening passed very slowly. My father, exhausted with pain, lay on the bed. I examined John's room. One corner was full of shelves, laden with books. On a chair, just as he had left it that morning, stood a loom, very small in size, but perfect in its neat workmanship, with a few threads already woven, making some fabric not so very unlike cloth.

"The lad works hard," said my father, half to himself. "He has useful hands and a clear head."

Evening began to close in. At supper-time Jem entered. He had kept watch all the time on the staircase by desire of "Mr. Halifax"—so he informed me. I asked if Jem had any idea when "Mr. Halifax" would be back?

"He said, maybe not till morning. Them's bad folk about. He was going to stop all night, either at your house or at the tan-yard, for fear of a blaze."

The word made my father start. He tried to dress, and to drag on his heavy shoes; but fell back, sick with exhaustion and pain. I made him lie down again on the bed. So we kept watch together, all the night through.

After midnight I heard by my father's breathing that he

was asleep. I knew nothing would disturb him till daylight; therefore I left him, and crept downstairs into Sally Watkins' kitchen. It was silent, only the faithful warder, Jem, dozed over the dull fire. I touched him on the shoulder.

"Where is Mr. Halifax?"

"Doan't know, sir—wish I did! wouldn't be long a-finding out, though—on'y he says: 'Jem, you stop 'ere wi' they'" (pointing his thumb up the staircase). "So, Master Phineas, I stop."

"Jem, lend me your coat and hat—I'm going out to look for Mr. Halifax."

And I escaped outside. Anything beyond his literal duty did not strike Jem. He stood on the doorsill, and gazed after me.

I stole along the dark alley into the street. It was very silent. On I ran, speeded by a dull murmur, which I fancied I heard. I flew along the churchyard, until I saw, shining against the boles of the chestnut trees, a red light. At last I had got in the midst of "the rioters".

They were a mere handful—not above two score. Wherever they had been ransacking, as yet they had not attacked my father's house; it stood up on the other side of the road—barred, black, and silent.

I heard a muttering—"Th' old man bean't there; nobody knows where he be." No, thank God!

"Be us all y'ere?" said the man with the torch, holding it up so as to see round him. "Ready, lads? Now for the rosin! Blaze 'un out."

But, in the scuffle, the torch, the only one alight, was knocked down and trodden out. The angry throng rushed on to the nearest lamp. One of them was left behind, standing close to our own railings. I thought I recognized him. "John?"

"Phineas?" He was beside me in a bound. "How could you do——"

"I could do anything to-night. But you are safe; no one has harmed you. Oh, thank God, you are not hurt!"

"Now, Phineas, we have a minute's time. I must have you safe—we must get into the house."

"And the mill?"

"Safe, as yet; I have been going to and fro all night, between there and here, waiting till the rioters should come back from the Severn mills. Hist! here they are—I say, Jael?"

He tapped at the window. In a few seconds Jael had unbarred the door, let us in, and closed it again securely.

"I have done all as thee bade me—thee art a sensible lad, John Halifax. We are secure, I think."

Secure? bolts and bars secure against fire? For that was threatening us now.

"They can't mean it—surely they can't mean it," repeated John, as the cry of "Burn 'un out!" rose louder and louder.

But they did mean it. From the window we watched them light torch after torch, sometimes throwing one at the house.

"I'll speak to them," John said. "Unbar the window, Jael;" and before I could hinder, he was leaning right out.

"My men, I want to speak to you."

The only answer was a shower of missiles, which missed their aim. The rioters were too far off—our spiked iron railings, eight feet high, being a barrier which none had yet ventured to climb. But at length one random stone hit John on the chest. I pulled him in, but he declared he was not hurt. I could hardly hear him for the bellowings outside. More savage still grew the cry—

"Burn 'em out! burn 'em out! They be only Quakers!"

"There's not a minute to lose—stop—Jael, is that a pistol?"

"Loaded," she said, handing it over to him. John ran downstairs, and before I guessed his purpose, had unbolted the hall-door, and stood on the flight of steps, in full view of the mob. Of course I followed.

The sight fairly confounded the rioters. "Who be thee?" "It's one o' the Quakers." "No, he bean't." "Burn 'un, anyhow." "Touch 'un, if ye dare."

There was evidently a division arising. One big man, who had made himself very prominent all along, seemed trying to calm the tumult. The big fellow advanced to the gate, and called John by his name.

"Is that you, Jacob Baines? I am sorry to see you here. What do you want?"

"Nought wi' thee. We wants Abel Fletcher. Where is 'um?"

"I shall certainly not tell you."

As John said this again the noise arose, and again Jacob Baines seemed to have power to quiet the rest. At length one voice, sharp and shrill, was heard.

"I zay, young man, didst ever know what it was to be pretty nigh vanished?"

"Ay, many a time."

The answer, so brief, so unexpected, struck a great hush into the throng. Then the same voice cried—

"Speak up, man! we won't hurt 'ee! You be one o' wel!"

"No, I am not one of you. I'd be ashamed to come in the night and burn my master's house down. What do you do it for? All because he would not sell you, or give you, his wheat. Even so—it was *his* wheat, not yours. May not a man do what he likes with his own? Don't you see how foolish you were? You tried threats, too. Now you all know Mr. Fletcher; you are his men—some of you. He is not a man to be threatened. Nor am I one to be threatened, neither. The first one of you who attempted to break into Mr. Fletcher's house I should most certainly have shot. But I'd rather not shoot you, poor, starving fellows! I know what it is to be hungry. I'm sorry for you—sorry from the bottom of my heart."

"But what must us do, Mr. Halifax?" cried Jacob Baines; "us be starved a'most. What's the good o' talking to we?"

John went down to the locked gate. "Suppose I gave you something to eat, would you listen to me afterwards?"

There arose a frenzied shout of assent. "Ay—ay! Some'at to eat; give us some'at to eat."

John Halifax called out to Jael: bade her bring all the food of every kind that there was in the house, and give it to him out of the parlour-window. She obeyed.

"Now, my lads, come in!" and he unlocked the gate.

They came thronging up the steps. John divided the food as well as he could among them; they fell to it like wild beasts. At length all the food we had in the house was consumed. John told them so; and they believed him.

"Well, my men," he said, looking round, "have you had enough to eat?"

"Oh, ay!" they all cried. And one man added, "Thank the Lord!"

"That's right, Jacob Baines, and, another time, *trust* the Lord."

"Us men ha' gotten a meal," said Jacob, "thankee for it; but what'll become o' the little 'uns at home? I say, Mr. Halifax," and he seemed waxing desperate again, "we must get food somehow. I knew thee as a lad; thee'rt a young man now, as will be a father some o' these days. Oh! Mr. Halifax,

may 'ee ne'er want a meal o' meat for the missus and the babbies at home, if ee'll get a bit o' bread for our'n this day."

"My man, I'll try."

He called me aside, explained to me, and asked my advice and consent, as Abel Fletcher's son, to a plan that had come into his mind. It was to write orders, which each man presenting at our mill, should receive a certain amount of flour.

"Do you think your father would agree?"

"I think he would."

John sat down and wrote. When about to sign the orders, he suddenly stopped. "No; I had better not. I have no right. Take the pen. It is your part to sign them, Phineas." I obeyed.

"Isn't this better than hanging?" said John to the men, when he had distributed the little bits of paper and made them all fully understand the same. "Why, there isn't another gentleman in Norton Bury, who, if you had come to burn *his* house down, would not have shot down one-half of you like mad dogs, and sent the other half to the county gaol. Now, for all your misdoings, we let you go quietly home, well fed, and with food for children too. *Why*, think you? Because Abel Fletcher is a Quaker, and a Christian."

"Hurrah for Abel Fletcher! hurrah for the Quakers!" shouted they, waking up the echoes down Norton Bury streets; which, of a surety, had never echoed to *that* shout before. And so the riot was over.

We found my father on John's bed, still asleep. But as we entered he woke. His face looked ten years older since yesterday. He stared, bewildered, at John Halifax.

"Eh, young man—oh! I remember. Where is my son—where's my Phineas?"

I fell on his neck as if I had been a child.

"Thee art not hurt? Nor anyone?"

"No," John answered; "nor is either the house or the tanyard injured."

He looked amazed. "How has that been?"

"Phineas will tell you."

I told the whole, without any comments on John's behaviour; he would not have liked it; and, besides, the facts spoke for themselves. Abel Fletcher listened in silence. John at length asked him if he were satisfied.

"Quite satisfied."

Having said this, he sat long, his hands locked together on his knees, motionless. John spoke to him gently.

"Are you very lame still? Could I help you to walk home?"

My father looked up, and slowly held out his hand. "Thee hast been a good lad, and a kind lad to us; I thank thee."

We got my father home. He entered, leaning heavily on John. He sat down, leaning his head on his two hands.

"John, how old art thee now?" said he.

"Twenty."

"Then, for one year from this time I will take thee as my prentice, though thee knowest already nearly as much of the business as I do. At twenty-one thee wilt be able to set up for thyself, or I may take thee into partnership—we'll see. But,"—and he looked at me, then sternly into John's steadfast eyes—"remember, thee hast in some measure taken that lad's place. May God deal with thee as thou dealest with my son Phineas—my only son!"

"Amen!" was the solemn answer.

CHAPTER IV

"Well done, Phineas—to walk round the garden without once resting! now I call that grand, after an individual has been ill a month. Nevertheless, you must have a change. Dr. Jessop insists upon it. Here have I been beating up and down the country for a week past 'In Search of a Country Residence'—and, do you know, I think I've found one at last. Such a nice place, on the slope of Enderley Hill. A cottage—Rose Cottage—for it's all in a bush of cluster-roses, up to the very roof. Mrs. Tod is a decent, comely woman. I think she said she had lodgers—an old gentleman."

We began talking about Enderley. I soon found that my father and John had arranged all. I was to be in charge of the latter. We young men were to set up for a month or two our bachelor establishment at Mrs. Tod's: John riding thrice a week over to Norton Bury to fulfil his duties at the tan-yard.

On a lovely August day we started for Enderley. It was about eight miles off, on a hilly, cross-country road. We

lumbered slowly along in our post-chaise; I leaning back, enjoying the fresh air and the changing views.

John looked extremely well to-day—decidedly like “the David” whose name I still gave him—“a goodly person”; tall, well built, and strong. On this day, I remember, I noticed an especial carefulness of attire, at his age neither unnatural nor unbecoming. Once he noticed my glance.

“Anything amiss about me, Phineas? You see I have slipped off my tan-yard husk, and put on the gentleman.”

“You couldn’t do that, John. You couldn’t put on what you were born with.”

He laughed—but I think he was pleased.

We had now come into a hilly region. “What a broad green sweep,” said John, “nothing but sky and common, common and sky. This is Enderley Flat. We shall come to its edge soon, where it drops abruptly into such a pretty valley. There, look down—that’s the church. We are on a level with the top of its tower. I like Enderley Hill.”

We wound a little way down the slope, and came in front of Rose Cottage. It was well named. The cottage had two entrances, each distinct. The general impression it gave, both as to sight and scent, was of roses—nothing but roses.

“How are you, Mrs. Tod?” as a comely, middle-aged body appeared at the right-hand doorway.

“I be pretty fair, sir—be you the same? The children ha’ not forgotten you—you see, Mr. Halifax.

“Don’t ’ee make more noise than ’ee can help, my lad,” the good woman said to our postboy, “because, sir, the sick gentleman bean’t so well again to-day.”

“I am sorry for it. We would not have driven up to the door had we known. Which is his room?”

Mrs. Tod pointed to a window—not on our side of the house, but the other. A hand was just closing the casement and pulling down the blind—a hand which seemed less like a man’s than a woman’s.

When we were settled in the parlour John noticed this fact.

“It was the wife, most likely. And how do you like Enderley?” asked he, when, tea being over, I lay and rested, while he sat leaning his elbow on the window-sill.

“It is very pretty, and so comfortable—almost like home.”

“I feel as if it were home,” John said. “I hardly ever felt so content before. We will have a happy time, Phineas.”

I lay until it grew quite dark; then I bade him good-night, and retired. Directly afterwards I heard him, as I knew he would, dash out of the house, and away up the Flat.

"That Mrs. Tod is an extraordinary woman—most extraordinary. She can hold her tongue."

"How so, David?"

"In two whole days she has not communicated to us a single fact concerning our neighbours on the other half of Rose Cottage."

"Did you want to know?"

John laughingly denied; then allowed that he always had a certain pleasure in eliciting information on men and things.

"The wife being indicated, I suppose, by that very complimentary word 'thing'."

He laughed. "And now I must be off to Norton Bury."

He rose up cheerily. Stooping over my easy-chair, he wheeled it to the window, in sight of the pleasant view. He lingered about, making me "all right", as he called it, and planning out my solitary day. With such merriment, too, for we were the gayest couple of young bachelors, when, as John said, "the duties of our responsible position" would allow.

"Responsible position! It's our landlady who ought to talk about that. There's one of the children got into mischief. Hark!"

"It's Jack, my namesake. I knew he would come to grief with that donkey." He disappeared like a shot, leaping out through the open window. The next minute I saw him carrying in the unlucky Jack, who was bleeding from a cut in the forehead, and screaming vociferously.

"Don't be frightened, Mrs. Tod; it is very slight."

But as soon as the good woman was satisfied that there was no real cause for terror, hers changed into hearty wrath against Jack for his carelessness.

"But he be always getting into mischief, sir—that boy. Three months back, the very day Mr. March came, he got playing with the carriage-horse, and it kicked him and broke his arm. A deal he cares."

"Have patience," answered John, who had again carried the young scapegrace from our parlour into Mrs. Tod's kitchen—the centre room of the cottage. "Come, forgive the lad. He will be more sorry afterwards than if you had punished

him. Nothing makes one so good as being forgiven when one has been naughty. Isn't it so, Jack, my namesake? Only, you must not disobey your mother again."

"No, sir—thank'ee, sir," sobbed Jack, humbly. "You be a gentleman—Mr. March bean't—he said it served me right for getting under his horses."

"Hold thy tongue!" said Jack's mother; for the latch of the opposite door was just then lifted, and a lady stood there.

"Mrs. Tod, my father will take his soup at eleven. You will remember?" "Yes, Miss March."

Upon which Miss March shut the door at once, and vanished. I glanced at John, but he did not see me; his eyes were fixed on the door, which had disclosed and concealed the momentary picture.

A girl, rather tall, of a figure built more for activity and energy than the mere fragility of sylph-like grace: dark-complexioned, dark-eyed, dark-haired—the whole colouring being of that soft darkness of tone which gives a sense of something at once warm and tender, strong and womanly.

"That is Miss March," said our landlady, when she had disappeared.

"Is it?" said John, removing his eyes from the shut door.

"She be very sensible-like, for a young body of seventeen; more sensible and pleasanter than her father, who is always ailing and always grumbling."

Still John kept standing by the kitchen-table. It was I who had to suggest that we should not intrude in Mrs. Tod's kitchen any longer.

"No—certainly not. Come, Phineas. Mrs. Tod, I hope our presence did not inconvenience—the young lady?"

"Bless your heart, sir! nothing ever inconveniences she. There bean't a pleasanter young body alive."

I watched John mount, and ride slowly down the bit of common—turning once to look back at Rose Cottage, ere he finally disappeared between the chestnut-trees.

I spent the whole long day alone in the cottage parlour. The sun had gone down over Nunnely Hill when I sat watching for John. It was nine o'clock before I heard the old mare's hoofs clattering up the road: joyfully I ran out.

David was not quite his youthful, gay self that night. He was very tired, and had what he called "the tan-yard feeling", the oppression of business cares.

"Times are hard," said he. "I don't see how your father can rightly be left with so many anxieties on his shoulders. I must manage to get to Norton Bury at least five days a week. But we'll make the most of every bit of time we have."

At seven next morning we were out on the Flat.

"I'm not going to let you stand here in the dews, Phineas. Come a little farther on, to my terrace, as I call it. There's a panorama! Do you like this? I do, very much. A dear, smiling, English valley, holding many a little nest of an English home. Down in the valley is the grand support of the neighbourhood, a large cloth-mill."

"That's quite in your line, John! What has become of that wonderful little loom you made?"

"Oh! I have it still. But this is such a fine cloth-mill! I have been all over it. You know, I always had a weakness for machinery. I could stand for an hour watching a mill at work, especially if it's worked by a great water-wheel."

"Would you like to be a mill-owner?"

"Shouldn't I!" with a sunshiny flash, which soon clouded over. "However, 'tis idle talking; one cannot choose one's calling. I'm a tanner, and a capital tanner I intend to be."

"There is somebody plucking posies on the Flat, John. See, how large the figure looks against the sky. I declare she looks very like Miss March."

"It is she," said John, so indifferently that I suspect that fact had presented itself to him for at least two minutes before I found it out.

Close to the cottage door, our two paths converging, and probably our breakfast-hours likewise, brought us suddenly face to face with Miss March. In passing her, John raised his eyes. For me, I could hardly take mine from her, such a pleasant creature was she to behold. She half-smiled—he bowed, which she returned, courteously, and we both went indoors.

"I like her face, David. Do you? A good—nay, a noble face; though still, with those irregular features, I can't—really I can't—call her beautiful."

"Nor I."

After which brief reply John relapsed into taciturnity.

We finished the morning by reading Shakespeare—*Romeo and Juliet*—at which the old folio seemed naturally to open. John read it through to me; and then, thinking I had fallen

asleep, he sat with the book on his knee, gazing out of the window.

A week slipped by. We had grown familiar with Enderley Hill—at least I had. As for John, he had little enough enjoyment of the pretty spot, being absent five days out of the seven. With me one day went by just like another. Being out of doors almost all day, I saw very little of the inhabitants of our cottage. Once or twice a lady and gentleman passed, creeping at the foot of the slope so slowly that I felt sure it must be Mr. March and his daughter. Except on these occasions, I had no opportunity of making any observations on the manners and customs of our neighbours. The two cottages were built distinct, so that we could have neither sound nor sight of our neighbours, save upon the neutral ground of Mrs. Tod's kitchen. Thus—save the two days when John was at home, I spent the week in dignified solitude, and was very thankful for Sunday.

We determined to make it a long, lovely, country Sunday; so we began it at six a.m. John took me a new walk across the common.

"Pray, have you ever met Miss March again, for I know you have been out most mornings?"

"Morning is the only time I have for walking, you know, Phineas."

"Ah, true! You have little pleasure at Enderley. But you did not tell me whether you had met Miss March again."

"She has never once seen me."

"But have you seen her? Answer honestly."

"Why should I not? Yes, I have seen her—once or twice or so—but never in any way that could annoy her."

"Nay—don't take it so seriously. It would be quite natural if a young man like you did use some pains to look at such a 'cunning piece of Nature's handiwork' as that apple-cheeked girl of seventeen."

"Russet apple. She is brown, you know—a real 'nut-brown mayde'," said John, recovering his gay humour. "Certainly, I like to look at her. I have seen many a face that was more good-looking—never one that looked half so good."

"Yes," I said, "it is quite natural that you should admire her. It would even be quite natural, and not unlikely either, if she——"

"Pshaw!" interrupted he. "What nonsense you are talk-

ing! Impossible! Why, I have only seen her five times; I never spoke to her in my life, and most probably never shall."

That long, quiet Sunday, when we lay on the common and heard church bells ringing; and talked our own old Sabbath talks, of this world and the world to come—that Sunday was the last I ever had David altogether for my very own.

About ten o'clock—just as he was luring me out to see how grand the common looked under the black night—Mrs. Tod came into the parlour and shut the door after her. Her round face looked somewhat troubled.

"Mr. Halifax; might I speak a word to 'ee, sir? It be about that poor Miss March. Her father is dreadful bad to-night, and it's a good seven-mile walk to the doctor's at S—; and I think, Mr. Halifax, if I might make so bold, it would be a great kindness in a young gentleman like you to lend Tod your mare to ride over and fetch the doctor."

"I will, gladly. At once?"

"Tod bean't come in yet."

"He shall have the mare with pleasure."

"Thank'ee, Mr. Halifax," said the honest landlady.

John closed the door after Mrs. Tod. But when he came and sat down again, I saw he was rather thoughtful. He could not settle to anything. At last he started up and said—

"Phineas, I think I'll go myself."

"Where?"

"To fetch Dr. Brown. If Tod is not come in, it would be but a common charity. And I know the way."

John was away a wonderfully short time, and the doctor rode back with him. They parted at the gate, and he came into our parlour. The kitchen clock struck one.

"You ought to have been in bed hours ago, Phineas. Will you not go? I shall sit up to hear how Mr. March is. Dr. Brown told me that in one of these paroxysms he might—oh, that poor young thing!"

"Has she no relatives, no brothers or sisters?"

"I did not like to ask, but I fancy not."

"Let us go and see if we can do anything more."

The kitchen fire burnt brightly, and a cricket sang in merry solitude on the hearth. We heard low talking, and presently stealthy footsteps crept downstairs. It was Mrs. Tod and Miss March. She saw us. John came forward.

"I hope, *madam*"—young men used the deferential word

in those days always—"I do hope that Mr. March is better. We were unwilling to retire until we had heard."

"Thank you! My father is much better. You are very kind," said Miss March, with a maidenly dropping of the eyes.

"Indeed he is kind," broke in the warm-hearted Mrs. Tod. "He rode all the way to S——, his own self, to fetch the doctor."

"Did you, sir? I thought you only lent your horse."

"Oh! I like a night-ride. And you are sure, madam, that your father is better? Is there nothing else I can do for you?"

His sweet, grave manner seemed entirely to reassure the young lady. She held out her hand to him.

"I thank you very much, Mr. Halifax. If I wanted help I would ask you; indeed I would."

"Thank you. Good-night."

The next day John rode away earlier even than was his wont, I thought. I had a long, quiet day alone in the beech-wood, close below our cottage, sitting by the little runnel, now worn to a thread with the summer weather, but singing still. It talked to me like a living thing. When I came home in the evening Miss March stood in front of the cottage, with—strange to say—her father. But I had heard that his paroxysms were often of brief continuance.

Seeing me coming, Miss March whispered to him; he turned upon me a listless gaze, and bowed languidly, without rising from his easy-chair.

His daughter came a step or two to meet me. "You are better, I see, Mr. Fletcher. Enderley is a most healthy place, as I try to persuade my father. This is Mr. Fletcher, sir."

"I am a very great invalid, sir—my dear, will you explain to the gentleman?" And he leaned his head back wearily.

"My father has never recovered his ten years' residence in the West Indies."

"Residence?" Pardon me, my dear, you forget I was governor of——"

"Oh, yes! The climate is very trying there, Mr. Fletcher."

I took gratefully a seat she gave me, beside that of Mr. March. She seemed inclined to talk to me; and her manner was perfectly easy, friendly, and kind. We spoke of commonplace subjects, and of the West Indian island which its late "governor" was apparently by no means inclined to forget. I asked Miss March whether she had liked it?

"I was never there. Papa was obliged to leave me behind in Wales—poor mamma's country."

In retiring, she asked if she could lend me any books to read? I must find the days long and dull without my friend. I assented with thanks; and shortly afterwards she brought me an armful of literature.

"I have no time to study much myself," said she, "but I like those who do. Now, good-evening, for I must run. You must not think"—and she turned back—"that because my father said little he and I are not deeply grateful for the kindness Mr. Halifax showed us last night."

"It was a pleasure to John—it always is—to do a kind office for anyone."

"I well believe that, Mr. Fletcher." And she left me.

When John came home I informed him of what had passed. He listened, though he made no comment whatever. But all the evening he sat turning over Miss March's books.

The next day in the afternoon he submitted to be led down to the beechwood, that the wonderful talking stream might hold forth to him as it did to me.

Coming back out of the little wood, I took John a new way I had discovered, through the prettiest undulating meadow, half-field, half-orchard. Under one of the trees, as we climbed the slope, we saw a vacant table laid.

"A pretty piece of rusticity," said John; "I should like to invite myself to tea with them. Who can they be?"

"Probably visitors. I should not wonder if this were not one of Mr. March's vagaries. There they both are coming hither from the house."

Sure enough they were—Miss March helping her father across the common to the gate which led to the field. Precisely at that gate we all four met. John held the gate open for the father and daughter to go through. She looked up and acknowledged him, smiling. Mr. March stopped.

"Mr. Halifax, I believe?" John bowed.

"Sir," said the elder, "I have to thank you——"

"Indeed, no thanks are needed. I sincerely hope you are better to-day?"

Mr. March assented. "My daughter tells me you are our neighbours—I am happy to have such friendly ones. Mr. Halifax, we are going to take tea under the trees there. Will you give us the pleasure of your company? You and your friend?"

Very soon we found ourselves established under the apple-tree, between whose branches the low sun stole in, kissing into red chestnut colour the hair of the "nut-brown mayde", as she sat, bareheaded, pouring into small white china cups that dainty luxury, tea. John sat opposite her—I by her side. We talked a good deal about Wales; John had been there more than once in his journeyings; and this fact seemed to warm Miss March's manner, rather shy and reserved though it was, at least to him. She told us many an innocent tale of her life there—of her childish days, and of her dear old governess, whose name, I remember, was Cardigan. She seemed to have grown up solely under that lady's charge. It was not difficult to guess that "poor mamma" had died so early as to become a mere name to her orphan daughter. She evidently owed everything she was to this good governess.

"My dear," at last said Mr. March, "you make rather too much of our excellent Jane Cardigan. She is going to be married, and she will not care for you now."

"Hush! papa, that is a secret at present. Pray, Mr. Halifax, do you know Norton Bury?"

The abruptness of the question startled John. He answered in a hurried affirmative. Indeed, Mr. March left him no time for further explanation.

"I hate the place. My late wife's cousins, the Brithwoods of the Mythe, with whom I have had—ahem!—strong political differences—live there. And I was once nearly drowned in the Severn, close by."

"Papa, don't speak of that, please," said Miss March, hurriedly; so hurriedly that I am sure she did not notice John's sudden and violent colour. But the flush died down again—he never spoke a word. And neither did I.

"For my part," continued the young lady, "I have no dislike to Norton Bury. Indeed, I rather admired the place, if I remember right."

"You have been there?" Though it was the simplest question, John's sudden look at her struck me as peculiar.

"Once, when I was about twelve years old. But we will talk of something papa likes better. Hark! how the doves are cooing in the beech-wood."

I asked her if she had ever been in the beech-wood.

No; she was quite unacquainted with its mysteries. She rose. "I should greatly like to hear your stream and its wonder-

ful singing." (John Halifax had been telling how it held forth to me during my long, lonely days)—"I wonder what it would say to me? Can we hear it from the bottom of this field?"

"Not clearly; we had better go into the wood."

She agreed to my plan with childish eagerness. I led Miss March down the meadow, and into the wood.

The young girl walked with me, as she talked with me, in perfect simplicity and frankness, free from the smallest hesitation. She talked to me a good deal about myself, asking what I did all day?—and if I were not rather dull sometimes, in this solitary country lodging?

"But then you have your friend. Has Mr. Halifax any brothers or sisters?"

"None. No relatives living. John is a brother, friend, everything in the world to me."

"Is he? He must be very good. Indeed, he looks so," observed Miss March thoughtfully. "And I believe—at least I have often heard—that good men are rare."

I had no time to enter into that momentous question, when the origin of it himself appeared, breaking through the bushes to join us. He apologized for so doing, saying Mr. March had sent him.

"I was obliged to startle you by jumping through the bushes; for I heard my own name. What terrible revelations has this friend of mine been making to you, Miss March?"

"Mr. Fletcher was telling me three simple facts: First, that you were an orphan, without relatives. Secondly, that you were his dearest friend. Thirdly—well, I never compromise truth—that you were good."

"And you?"

"The first I was ignorant of; the second I had already guessed; the third——"

He gazed at her intently.

"The third I had likewise—not doubted."

John looked greatly pleased—nay, happy. He walked forward by Miss March's side, while I fell behind. Thus I followed these young people through the quiet wood.

They stood by the little rivulet, and in her free-hearted, girlish fun, she formed a cup out of a broad leaf, which, by the greatest ingenuity, she managed to make contain about two tea-spoonfuls of water for the space of half a minute, and held it to my mouth.

"I am like Rebecca at the well. Drink, Eliezer," she cried, gaily.

John looked on. "I am very thirsty, too," said he, in a low voice.

The young girl hesitated a moment; then filled and offered to him the Arcadian cup. I fear he drank out of it a deeper and more subtle draught than that innocent water.

When we took leave of our acquaintances, Mr. March declared our society would always be a pleasure to himself and his daughter.

"He always says so formally, 'my daughter'," I observed, breaking the silence in which they had left us. "I wonder what her Christian name is."

"I believe it is Ursula."

"How did you find that out?"

"It is written in one of her books."

CHAPTER V

Next day, and several days following, we had nothing but wind, rain, and storm. John went every day to Norton Bury that week. His mind seemed restless; every night I heard him go out in all the storm to walk upon the common. On the Saturday morning, I heard him ask Mrs. Tod how Mr. March was? We knew the invalid had been ailing all the week.

Mrs. Tod shook her head. "He is very bad, sir. She sits up wi' him best part of every night."

"I imagined so. I have seen her light burning. If he should grow worse let me go for Dr. Brown. I shall be at home all day."

"I'll tell Miss March of your kindness, sir," said Mrs. Tod, as she disappeared.

"Were you not going to Norton Bury to-day, John?"

"I was—but I have changed my mind. You have been left so much alone lately. Nay—I'll not disguise the truth; I had another reason. It is about our fellow-lodgers. Dr. Brown—I met him this morning—told me that her father cannot live more than a few days—perhaps a few hours. And she does not know it." I could see he was very much affected.

"Her relatives—surely they ought to be sent for?"

"She has none. Dr. Brown said she once told him so: none nearer than the Brithwoods of the Mythe—and we know what the Brithwoods are."

A young gentleman and his young wife—proverbially the gayest, proudest, most light-hearted of all our county families.

"She ought to be told: she must be told: she may have many things to say to her poor father. Phineas, what can we do? Let us forget that they are strangers, and act as one Christian ought to another. Do *you* not think she ought to be told?"

"Most decidedly. They might get further advice."

"That would be vain. Dr. Brown says it is a hopeless case, has been so for long; but he would not believe it, nor have his daughter told."

At this moment Mrs. Tod, who had been seeing Dr. Brown to his horse, entered our parlour—pale, with swollen eyes.

"Oh, Mr. Halifax!" and the kind soul burst out into crying. "That poor Mr. March! I didn't like him very much alive, but I do feel so sorry now he's a-dying."

Then he *was* dying.

"Does his daughter know?" I asked.

"No—no—I dare not tell her. Nobody dare."

John said, in a low voice, "Mrs. Tod, she ought to be told—and you would be the best person to tell her." But the soft-hearted landlady recoiled from the task.

"I think," said John, "that a woman would be the best. But if you object, and as Dr. Brown will not be here till to-morrow—and as there is no one else—if you like I will tell her myself."

Mrs. Tod overwhelmed him with thankfulness.

"How shall I meet her, then? If it were done by chance it would be best."

"I'll manage it somehow." And Mrs. Tod ran out of the room.

Hour by hour of that long day the rain fell down. It was nearly dusk before Mrs. Tod told us Mr. March was asleep, that his daughter had at last been persuaded to come downstairs, and was drinking "a cup o' tea" by the kitchen fire.

"You must go now, sir. She'll not stop five minutes. Please go."

"I will," he answered; but he turned frightfully pale. "If there were anybody to tell her this but me!"

He went out. I did not follow him; but I heard afterwards what transpired.

She was standing so absorbed that she did not notice his entrance. When she turned and spoke to John, it was with a changed manner. No hesitation, no shyness; trouble had put aside both.

"Thank you, my father is indeed seriously ill. I am in great trouble, you see, though Mrs. Tod is very, very kind. Don't cry so, good Mrs. Tod; I can't cry, I dare not. Why does she sob so, Mr. Halifax? Papa will be better to-morrow, I am sure."

"I *hope* so," he answered, dwelling on the word; "we should always hope to the very last."

"The last?" with a quick, startled glance.

"And then we can only trust."

Something more than the *mere* words struck her. She turned abruptly to John. That woeful gaze of hers could be answered by no words. He took her hand. She said to me afterwards that he seemed to look down upon her like a strong, pitiful, comforting angel.

Then she broke away, and flew upstairs. John came in again to me, and sat down. He did not speak for many minutes.

After an interval we heard Mrs. Tod calling loudly for "Mr. Halifax". We both ran to the foot of the stairs that led to Mr. March's room.

Mr. March's room! Alas, he owned nothing now on this earth of ours. He had gone from it, the spirit stealing quietly away in sleep.

Mrs. Tod sat half-way down the staircase, holding Ursula March across her knees. The poor creature was insensible, or nearly so. John took her in his arms, carried her across the kitchen into our little parlour, and laid her down on my sofa, Mrs. Tod sobbing over her like a child.

"Now, Phineas, let us go away."

And he went straight out of the house, I following him.

The morning after, he and I settled that we should leave our portion of the cottage entirely at Miss March's disposal, while we inhabited hers. We received a message to the effect that Miss March would not refuse our "kindness".

I could not help wondering if the poor young creature had any relative or friend to come to her in this sad time. But our speculations were set at rest by a request brought by Mrs. Tod—that Mr. Halifax would go with her to speak to Miss March.

When, after some time, he returned, he told me all that had passed—how he and Mrs. Tod had conjointly arranged the hasty funeral—how brave and composed she had been—that poor child, all alone!

"Has she indeed no one to help her?"

"No one. She might send for Mr. Brithwood, but he was not friendly with her father; she said she had rather ask this 'kindness' of me, because her father had liked me."

I watched John as he stood by the fire. In his whole aspect was such honest truth that no wonder, little as she knew of him, this poor orphan should not have feared to trust him entirely.

"Did she tell you anything of her circumstances, John?"

"No. But from something Mrs. Tod let fall, I fear"—and he vainly tried to disguise his extreme satisfaction—"that she will be left with little or nothing."

Two days after, our little company followed the coffin out of the woodbine porch, across the few yards of common to the churchyard. A small procession—the daughter first, supported by good Mrs. Tod, then John Halifax and I.

We followed the orphan home. We heard no more from Miss March that day. The next, we received a message of thanks for our "kindness". She had given way at last, Mrs. Tod said, and kept her chamber.

On Monday a message came, saying that Miss March would be glad to speak with us both. We went. She was sitting alone, in our old parlour, very grave and pale, but perfectly composed. She rose, and we shook hands in silence.

We began to talk of common things—not *the* thing. She seemed to have fought through the worst of her trouble. I asked her how long she intended staying at Enderley?

"I can hardly tell. Once I understood that my cousin Richard Brithwood was left my guardian. This was to have been altered, I believe. I wish it had been. You know Norton Bury, Mr. Halifax?" "I live there."

"Indeed! Then you are probably acquainted with my cousin and his wife?"

"No; but I have seen them."

"Will you tell me candidly—for I know nothing of her—what sort of person is Lady Caroline Brithwood?"

"She was, you are aware, Lady Caroline Ravenel, the Earl of Luxmore's daughter."

"Yes, yes; but that does not signify. I know nothing of Lord Luxmore—I want to know what she is herself."

John hesitated, then answered, "She is said to be very charitable to the poor, pleasant and kind-hearted. But, if I may venture to hint as much, not exactly the friend whom I think Miss March would choose, or to whom she would like to be indebted for anything but courtesy."

"That was not my meaning. I need not be indebted to anyone. Only, if she were a good woman, Lady Caroline would have been a great comfort and a useful adviser to one who is scarcely eighteen, and, I believe, an heiress."

"An heiress!" The colour flashed in a torrent over John's whole face, then left him pale. "I—pardon me—I thought it was otherwise. Allow me to—express my pleasure——"

"It does not add to mine," said she, half-sighing. "Jane Cardigan always told me riches brought many cares."

Soon after, John rose to take leave.

"Do not go yet; I want to ask about Norton Bury. I had no idea you lived there. And Mr. Fletcher too?" I replied in the affirmative.

"In what part of the town?" "On the Coltham Road, near the Abbey."

"Ah, those Abbey chimes!—how I used to listen to them, night after night, when the pain kept me awake!"

"What pain?" asked John, suddenly.

Miss March smiled. "Oh! I had nearly forgotten it, though it was very bad at the time; only that I cut my wrist rather dangerously with a bread-knife, in a struggle with my nurse."

"When was that?" eagerly inquired John.

"Let me see—five, six years ago. But, indeed, 'tis nothing."

"Not exactly 'nothing'. Do tell me!"

"Well, if you must know, it was one of my naughtinesses—I was very naughty as a child. They would not let me have a piece of bread that I wanted to give away to a poor lad."

"Who stood opposite—under an alley—in the rain?—was it not so?"

"How could you know? But he looked so hungry; I was so sorry for him. I have often thought of him since, when I chanced to look at this mark."

"Let me look at it—may I?"

Taking her hand, he softly put back the sleeve, discovering, just above the wrist, a deep, discoloured seam. He gazed at it,

his features all quivering, then, without a word either of adieu or apology, he quitted the room.

Miss March sat in extreme surprise, looking at the door where John had disappeared.

"What does he mean, Mr. Fletcher? Why did he go away?"

"I know the reason. I would tell you, but I think John would prefer telling you himself."

"As he pleases," returned Miss March. She began asking me many questions about the Brithwoods and about Norton Bury. I answered them freely—my only reservation being, that I took care not to give any information concerning ourselves. Soon afterwards, as John did not return, I took leave of her, and went to our own parlour.

He was not there. He had left word that he was gone a long walk, and should not return till dinner-time. Dinner-time came, but I had to dine alone.

He did not come till it was nearly dusk. After tea I insisted on his taking my arm-chair. He leaned back and shut his eyes. Oh, the utter weariness of body and soul that was written on his face!

We sat silent. At nine o'clock Mrs. Tod came in with supper. She was brimful of news. She had been all that evening packing up for Miss March. Who would have thought Mr. March had such grand relations? Had we seen Lady Caroline Brithwood's coach that came that day?—sent on purpose for Miss March—only she wouldn't go. "But now she has made up her mind, poor dear. She is leaving to-morrow."

When John heard this he stood motionless, till the good woman was gone. Then he staggered to the mantelpiece, and leaned on it with both his elbows, his hands covering his face.

There was no disguise now. A young man's first love—not first fancy, but first love—in all its passion, desperation, and pain—had come to him. I said gently, "David!"

"Let me go out—out into the air." Snatching up his hat, he rushed from me. I did not dare to follow.

After waiting some time I could bear the suspense no longer, and went out.

It was a pitch-dark night, and the common looked as wide, and black, and still, as a midnight sea. I called out John's name—but nothing answered. I went on blindly, shouting as I went. At length I stumbled and fell. Someone came darting through the mist, and lifted me up.

"Oh! David!—David!"

"Phineas—is that you? You have come out this bitter night—why did you? I was not myself. I am better now. Come—let us go home."

He put his arm round me and brought me safely into the house. He even sat down by the fire to talk with me. Whatever struggle there had been, I saw it was over.

"She goes to-morrow; you are sure, Phineas?"

"I believe so. Shall you see her again?"

"If she desires it."

"Shall you say anything to her?"

"Nothing. If for a little while I felt I had strength to remove all impediments, I now see that even to dream of such things makes me a fool, or possibly worse—a knave. I will be neither—I will be a man. Did she ask why I left her so abruptly this morning?"

"She did; I said you would probably tell her the reason yourself."

"I will. She must no longer be kept in ignorance about me or my position. I shall tell her the whole truth—save one thing. She need never know that."

I guessed what the "one thing" was; which he counted as nothing; but which, I think, any true woman would have counted worth everything—the priceless gift of a good man's love.

I sighed. John turned round. "Phineas, you must not think—because of this—you must not think I could ever think less, or feel less, about my brother."

He spoke with a full heart. We clasped hands warmly and silently. I think we parted that night as we had never parted before; feeling that whatever new ties might gather round each, our two hearts would cleave together until death.

The next morning John called me to go with him on the common. He chose his old walk—his "terrace". We came to that part which overhung the churchyard. Both of us glanced instinctively down to the as yet nameless grave. Someone stood beside it—the only one who was likely to be there.

John stayed—we were standing where she could not see us—till she had slowly left the grave. He moved away. I asked him if we should take our walk now? But he did not seem to hear me.

He descended from the Flat, and came quickly round the

corner of the cottage. Miss March stood there, trying to find one fresh rose among the fast-withering clusters. She saw us and acknowledged us.

"The roses are all gone," she said, rather sadly.

"Perhaps, higher up, I can reach one—shall I try?"

"Thank you. I wanted to take some away with me—I am leaving Rose Cottage to-day, Mr. Halifax."

"So I have heard."

Re-entering the house, she asked us if we would come in with her. We all went into the little parlour.

"Yes—I am going away," said she, mournfully.

"We hope all good will go with you—always and everywhere."

"Thank you, Mr. Fletcher. Circumstances have fixed my plans since I saw you yesterday. I am going to reside for a time with my cousins, the Brithwoods. It seems best for me. Lady Caroline is very kind, and I am so lonely."

A little more fragmentary conversation passed, chiefly between herself and me—John uttered scarcely a word.

"This is not a very long good-bye, I trust?" said she to me.

"I shall remain at the Mythe House some weeks, I believe. How long do you purpose staying at Enderley?" I was uncertain.

"But your home is in Norton Bury? I hope you will allow my cousin to express in his own house his thanks and mine for your great kindness during my trouble?"

Neither of us answered. Miss March looked surprised.

"Mr. Halifax, I know nothing of my cousin, and I do know you. Will you tell me candidly whether there is anything in Mr. Brithwood which you think unworthy of your acquaintance?"

"He would think me unworthy of his," was the low, firm answer.

Miss March smiled incredulously. "Because you are not very rich? What can that signify? It is enough for me that my friends are gentlemen."

"Mr. Brithwood, and many others, would not allow my claim to that title."

The young gentlewoman drew back a little. "I do not quite understand you."

"Let me explain, then. It is right, Miss March, that you should know who and what I am, to whom you are giving the

honour of your kindness. Perhaps you ought to have known before; but here at Enderley we seemed to be equals—friends.”

“I have indeed felt it so.”

“Then you will the sooner pardon my not telling you—what you never asked, and I was only too ready to forget—that we are *not* equals—that is, society would not regard us as such—and I doubt if even you yourself would wish us to be friends.”

“Why not?”

“Because you are a gentlewoman and I am a tradesman.”

The news was evidently a shock to her. She sat perfectly silent. John’s voice grew firmer—prouder.

“My calling is, as you will soon hear at Norton Bury, that of a tanner. I am apprentice to Abel Fletcher—Phineas’s father. Phineas is a little less beneath your notice than I am. He is rich—he has been well educated; I have had to educate myself. I came to Norton Bury six years ago—a beggar-boy. No, not quite that—for I never begged! I either worked or starved. Phineas found me in an alley—starving. We stood in the rain, opposite the mayor’s house. A little girl—you know her, Miss March—came to the door, and threw out to me a bit of bread.”

Now indeed she started. “You—was that you?”

“It was I. I never forgot that little girl. Many a time, when I was inclined to do wrong, she kept me right—the remembrance of her sweet face and her kindness.”

That face was pressed down against the sofa where she sat. I think Miss March was all but weeping. John continued.

“I am glad to have met her again—glad to have been able to do her some small good in return for the infinite good she once did me. I shall bid her farewell now—at once and altogether.”

A quick turn of the hidden face asked him “Why?”

“Because,” John answered, “the world says we are not equals, and it would neither be for Miss March’s honour nor mine did I try to force upon it the truth—which I may prove openly one day—that we *are* equals.”

Miss March looked up at him—it were hard to say with what expression, of pleasure, or pride, or simple astonishment; perhaps a mingling of all. Then she silently offered her hand first to me and then to John.

“Miss March,” he said, “perhaps I may never see you

again—at least, never as now. Let me look once more at that wrist which was hurt.”

Her left arm was hanging over the sofa. John took the hand, and held it firmly. Suddenly he pressed his lips to the place where the wound had been—a kiss long and close, such as only a lover’s kiss could be. A moment afterwards, he was gone.

That day Miss March departed, and we remained at Enderley alone.

CHAPTER VI

It was winter-time. John and I were walking together along the road towards the Mythe House, now closed for months, the family being away. The meadows alongside, where the Avon had overflowed and frozen, were a popular skating-ground: and the road was alive with lookers-on.

Among the rest there overtook us a little elderly lady—Mrs. Jessop, our good doctor’s new wife.

“She seems to like you very much,” I said, as, after a cordial greeting, she trotted on.

“They were both very kind to me in London, last month, as I think I told you.”

We came once more upon the old lady, watching the skaters. She again spoke to John, and looked at me.

“I think I know who your friend is, though you do not introduce him.” (John hastily performed that ceremony.)

“Tom and I”—(how funny to hear her call our old bachelor doctor “Tom”!)—“were wondering what had become of you, Mr. Halifax. You have never crossed our door-sill since we returned home!”

He coloured deeply. “Your kindness to me in London was no reason for my intruding on you in Norton Bury. It might not be agreeable for you and Dr. Jessop to have my acquaintance here. I am a tradesman.”

The little old lady’s eyes brightened. “Mr. Halifax, I had heard you were a tradesman; I found out for myself that you were a gentleman. I do not think the two facts incompatible, nor does my husband. We shall be happy to see you at our house at all times and under all circumstances.”

She offered him her hand. John bowed over it in silence,

but it was long since I had seen him look more pleased. On her invitation, John and I and the little old lady walked on together.

"I know this road well, Mr. Halifax. Once I spent a summer here, with an old pupil, now grown up. I am going to-day to inquire about her at the Mythe House. The Brithwoods came home yesterday. I hope they will remain here some time. I have a special interest in their stay. Not on Lady Caroline's account, though. She patronizes me kindly; but I doubt if she ever forgets that I was the poor governess, Jane Cardigan."

"Jane Cardigan!" I exclaimed.

"What, Mr. Fletcher, you know my name! And really, now I think of it, I believe I have heard yours. Not from Tom, either. Did you ever hear of a Miss Ursula March?"

The live crimson rushed madly over John's face. I replied, "that we had the honour of meeting Miss March last summer at Enderley."

"Yes," the old lady continued. "Now I recollect, Miss March told me of the circumstances; of two gentlemen there, who were very kind to her when her father died; a Mr. Fletcher and his friend—was that Mr. Halifax?"

"It was," I answered: for John was speechless.

Mrs. Jessop stopped at the gates of the Mythe House.

"You will come and see us, Mr. Halifax? Promise!"

"If you wish it."

The iron gates closed upon her. We went home.

Passing the tanyard John proposed that we should call for my father. My poor father; now daily leaning more and more upon John, who, though still ostensibly a 'prentice, had now the business almost entirely in his hands.

We walked through Norton Bury streets, where everybody knew us and nearly everybody greeted us—at least one of us. Dr. Jessop's neat little carriage, and neatest of little wives, stopped at the curb-stone and summoned John.

"I want you and Mr. Fletcher to come to us to-morrow. Lady Caroline Brithwood wishes to see you." "Me?"

"Yes, you," smiled the old lady; "you, John Halifax, the hero of the people, who quelled the bread riots, and gave evidence thereupon to Mr. Pitt, in London. Nay! why didn't you tell me the wonderful story? Her ladyship is full of it. You *must* come."

Waiting no refusal, Mrs. Jessop drove on.

As we sat at tea, there came in two dainty little notes bidding us to a "little supper" at Dr. Jessop's, with Mr. and Lady Caroline Brithwood, of the Mythe House.

"Give them to your father, Phineas." And John vainly tried to hide the smiles that came and went. "To-morrow—you see, it is to-morrow."

My father's sharp voice roused him. "Lad, why cannot thee keep in thy own rank? Be an honest tradesman, as I have been."

"And as I trust always to be. But that is only my calling, not me. I—John Halifax—am just the same, whether in the tan-yard or Dr. Jessop's drawing-room. The one position cannot degrade, nor the other elevate me."

"Eh? Then, thee thinkest thyself already quite a gentleman?" "I hope I am."

"Fit to associate with the finest folk in the land?"

"If they desire it, and I choose it, certainly."

Now, Abel Fletcher liked honesty; and something in John's bold spirit seemed to-day to strike him more than ordinarily.

"John, why dost thee want to go among those grand folk?"

"Not because they are grand folk. I have other reasons—strong reasons."

"Be honest. Tell me thy strong reasons."

"I will. I wish first to find out, for myself, whether Lady Caroline Brithwood is fitted to have under her charge one who is young—innocent—good."

"Has she such an one? One thee knows?" "Yes."

"Man or woman?" "Woman."

My father turned, and looked John full in the eyes. Stern as that look was, I traced in it a strange compassion.

"Lad, I thought so. Thee hast found the curse of man's life—woman."

"Stop!" John cried. "The lady——"

"It is a 'lady'! Now I see why thee would fain be a gentleman. Tell me all; honour is bold—shame only silent."

"I feel no shame—an honest love is no disgrace to any man. And my confessing it harms no one. She neither knows of it nor returns it."

As he said this, slowly, gravely, John sat down. We all three sat silent for a long time; then my father said—

"Who is she?"

"I had rather not tell you. She is above me in worldly station."

"Ah!" a fierce exclamation. "But thee wouldst not humble thyself—ruin thy peace for life? Thee wouldst not marry her?"

"I would—if she had loved me. Even yet, if by any honourable means I can rise to her level, so as to be able to win her love, marry her I will."

That brave "I will"—it seemed to carry its own fulfilment. Its indomitable resolution struck my father with a sort of awe.

"Do as thee thinks best, and God help thee," he said, kindly. "Mayst thee never find thy desire a curse. Fear not, lad—I will keep thy counsel."

Years afterwards, when all that remained of Abel Fletcher was a green mound in the Friend's burying-ground, I learnt that my poor mother, the young, thoughtless creature, whose married life had been so unhappy, and so brief, was by birth a "gentlewoman".

Mrs. Jessop's drawing-room, glittering with candle-light; a few women in pale-coloured dresses, a few men in blue coats and yellow waistcoats—this was all I noticed of the scene, which was quite a novel scene to me.

The doctor's wife introduced us formally to all her guests. "Mr. Brithwood and Lady Caroline will be late," I overheard her say. "I think I told you that Miss March——"

But here the door was flung open, and the missing guests announced. John and I were in the alcove of the window; I heard his breathing behind me, but I dared not look at or speak to him. No—she was not there.

I had seldom seen the squire or Lady Caroline. He was a portly young man, pinched in by tight garments. She was a lady rather past her first youth, but very handsome still. One could not choose but look at her, this handsome Lady Caroline, whom half Norton Bury adored, the other half pursed up their lips at the mention of. To-night nearly everyone present stole gradually into the circle round her, charmed by the fascination of her ripe beauty and her lively manner.

On her entrance John had drawn back a little, and our fellow-guests, who had been conversing with him, crept out of his way; as if they were aghast at the great gulf that lay between John Halifax the tanner and the Brithwoods of the Mythe. So it came to pass, that while everybody gathered round the Brith-

woods, John and I stood alone, and half-concealed by the window. Soon I heard Lady Caroline's loud whisper—

"Mrs. Jessop, my good friend, one moment. Where is your *jeune héros, l'homme du peuple*? I do not see him. Does he wear clouted shoes? Has he a broad face and turned-up nose, like your *paysans anglais*?"

"Judge for yourself, my lady—he stands at your elbow. Mr. Halifax, let me present you to Lady Caroline Brithwood."

If Lord Luxmore's fair daughter ever looked confounded in her life she certainly did at this minute.

"*Lui? Mon Dieu! Lui!*"

He bowed gravely, she made a gracious curtsy; they met on equal terms, a lady and gentleman.

Soon her lively manner returned. "I am enchanted to meet you, Mr. Halifax; I adore *le peuple*. *Me comprenez-vous?*"

"*Madame, je vous comprends.*"

Her ladyship looked surprised. French was not very common among any but the higher classes in England. "You know French—let us talk in that language."

"I cannot speak it readily; I am chiefly self-taught."

"The best teaching."

They talked a long time. She drew him out, as a well-bred woman always can draw out a young man of sense. He looked pleased; he conversed well.

"Lady Caroline" (her ladyship turned to her intrusive hostess), "I fear we must give up all expectations of our young friend to-night."

"I told you so. Post-travelling is very uncertain, and the Bath roads are not good."

"But she is surely long on the road," pursued Mrs. Jessop, rather anxiously. "What attendants had she?"

"Her own maid, and our man, Laplace. Nay, don't be alarmed, excellent and faithful *gouvernante*! I assure you your fair ex-pupil is quite safe."

It was now almost supper-time. "Before we adjourn," said Lady Caroline, "I must do what it will be difficult to accomplish after supper; I must introduce you to my husband. Mr. Brithwood!"

"Madam!" He lounged up to her. They were a diverse pair. She, in her well-preserved beauty—he, in his coarse, bloated youth.

"Mr. Brithwood, let me introduce you to a new friend of

mine. He belongs to this your town—you must have heard of him, perhaps met him.”

“I have more than once had the pleasure of meeting Mr. Brithwood, but he has doubtless forgotten it.”

“By Jove! I have. What might your name be, sir?”

“John Halifax.”

“What, Halifax the tanner?” “The same.”

“Phew!” He began a low whistle, and turned on his heel. John changed colour a little. Lady Caroline whispered her husband—

“*Mon ami*—you forget; I have introduced you to this gentleman.”

“Gentleman indeed! Pooh! rubbish! Lady Caroline—I’m busy talking.”

“And so are we, most pleasantly. I only called you as a matter of form, to ratify my invitation. Mr. Halifax will, I hope, dine with us next Sunday?”

“Madam, you must be crazy. The young man is a tradesman—a tanner. Not fit for *my* society.”

“Precisely; I invite him for my own.”

But the whispers and responses were alike unheeded by their object. For, at the doorway, entering with Mrs. Jessop, was a tall girl in deep mourning. We both knew her—our “nut-brown mayde”.

John was near to the door—their eyes met. She bowed—he returned it. He was very pale. For Miss March, her face and neck were all in a glow. She moved on, and sat down beside me, accidentally, I believe, but when she saw me she held out her hand. She said “she was very glad to see me”.

The squire called across the room: “I say, young Halifax!”

“Were you addressing me, Mr. Brithwood?”

“I was. I want a quiet word or two—between ourselves.”

“Certainly.”

They stood face to face. The one seemed uncomfortable, the other was his natural self—what Richard Brithwood, with all his broad acres, could never be—a gentleman. Few could doubt that fact, who looked at the two young men, as all were looking now.

“On my soul, it’s awkward—you’ll not heed my wife’s nonsense?”

“I do not understand you.”

“Come, let’s be open and plain. I mean no offence. You

may be a very respectable young man for aught I know, still, rank is rank, and really, in spite of my lady's likings, I can't well invite you to my table!"

"Nor could I humiliate myself by accepting any such invitation."

He said the words distinctly, so that the whole circle might have heard, and was turning away, when Mr. Brithwood fired up.

"Humiliate yourself! What do you mean, sir? Wouldn't you be only too thankful to crawl into the houses of your betters, by hook or by crook? I know you would. It's always the way with you common folk, you rioters, you revolutionists."

"Sir, I am neither a rioter nor a revolutionist."

"But you are a tradesman? You used to drive Fletcher's cart of skins." "I did."

"And are you not—I remember you now—the very lad, the tanner's lad, that once pulled us ashore from the egre—Cousin March and me?"

I heard a quick exclamation beside me, and saw Ursula listening intently. Her eyes were fixed on John, waiting for his answer. It came.

"Your memory is correct; I was that lad."

"Thank'ee for it too. You got no reward, though. Come, I'll make it twenty guineas."

The insult was too much. "Sir, you forget that whatever we may have been, to-night we meet as equals."

"Equals!"

"As guests in the same house—most certainly for the time being, equals."

Richard Brithwood stared, literally dumb with fury. The standers-by were dumb, too. Mr. Brithwood's wife merely shrugged her shoulders and hummed. It irritated the husband.

"Hold your tongue, my lady. What, because a 'prentice-lad once saved my life, and you choose to patronize him as you do many another vagabond, am I to have him at my table, and treat him as a gentleman? Never!"

He spoke savagely and loud. John was silent; but it was easy to see that his blood was at boiling heat. Richard Brithwood came up to him with clenched fist. "Now mark me, you—you vagabond!"

Ursula March crossed the room, and caught his arm, her eyes gleaming fire. "Cousin, in my presence this gentleman

shall be treated as a gentleman. He was kind to my father."

"Curse your father!"

John's right hand clutched the savage by the shoulder. "Be silent. You had better."

Brithwood shook off the grasp, turned and struck him. John staggered. For a moment he seemed as if he would have sprung on his adversary and felled him to the ground—but—he did it not.

Someone whispered, "He won't fight. He is a Quaker."

"No!" he said, and stood erect; his voice sounded hoarse and strange. "But I am a Christian. I shall not return blow for blow."

No one answered him; all stared at him. Then Ursula March stretched out her friendly hand. John took it, and grew calm in a moment. There arose a murmur of "Mr. Brithwood is going."

"Let him go!" Miss March cried.

"Not so—it is not right. I will speak to him." John softly unclosed her detaining hand, and went up to Mr. Brithwood. "Sir, there is no need for you to leave this house—I am leaving it. You and I shall not meet again if I can help it."

His proud courtesy, his absolute dignity and calmness, completely overwhelmed his blustering adversary. John made his adieu to his host and to those he knew. Lady Caroline, amid a flutter of regrets, declared she did not believe there was a man in the universe who would have borne so charmingly such a "degradation".

At the word Miss March fired up. "Madam," she said, "no insult offered to a man can ever degrade him; the only real degradation is when he degrades himself."

John, passing out, caught her words. As he quitted the room no crowned victor ever wore a look more proud.

After a minute we followed him; the Doctor's wife and I. But now the pride had faded. "Mrs. Jessop," he murmured, "I ought not to have come here. It is a hard world for such as I. I shall never conquer it—never."

"Yes—you will." And Ursula stood by him, with crimsoned cheek, and eyes no longer flashing, but fearless still. "You have showed me what I shall remember all my life—that a Christian only can be a true gentleman."

She understood him—he felt she did. They grasped hands once more, and gazed unhesitatingly into each other's eyes.

Then we made a hasty adieu, and went out together into the night.

For weeks after then, we went on in our usual way. Ursula March had left her cousin's, and come to reside with Dr. Jessop and his wife. Though John saw her constantly, it was always by chance—a momentary glimpse at the window, or a passing acknowledgment in the street.

I watched him closely, day by day. For a great change was creeping over him. His strength was going from him—he was becoming thin, weak, restless-eyed.

"What am I to do with thee, David?" said I to him one evening, when he had come in, looking worse than usual. "Thou art very ill, I fear?"

"Not at all. There is not the least thing the matter with me. Do let me alone."

Two minutes afterwards he begged my pardon for those sharp-spoken words.

"John," I said, "what if you were to go to her and tell her all?"

"I have thought of that: a noble thought, worthy of a poor 'prentice lad! Why, two several evenings I have been insane enough to walk to Dr. Jessop's door, which I have never entered, and—mark you well! they have never asked me to enter since that night. But each time ere I knocked my senses came back, and I went home—luckily having made myself neither a fool nor a knave."

There was no answer to this. In the eye of the world's common sense, for a young man not twenty-one, a tradesman's apprentice, to ask the hand of a young gentlewoman, uncertain if she loved him, was most utter folly. Also, for a penniless youth to sue a lady with a fortune, would, in the eye of the world's honour, be not very much unlike knavery.

"David," I groaned, "I would you had never seen her."

"Hush!" He rose, and walked rapidly up and down. His looks were becoming altogether wild. "I have looked on her for the last time. To-morrow I am away to Bristol, to set sail for America. Hurrah, Phineas, lad! We'll have a merry night!"

He wrung my hands with a long, loud, half-mad laugh; and then dropped heavily on a chair. A few hours after, he was lying on my bed, struck down by sickness. It was apparently a low, aguish fever, which had been much about Norton Bury since the famine of last year. At least, so Jael said; and she was

a wise doctress. He would have no one else to attend to him—seemed terrified at the mere mention of Dr. Jessop.

After a few days we called in a physician—a stranger from Coltham—who pronounced it to be this Norton Bury fever. It must have been coming on, the doctor said, for a long time; but it had no doubt now reached its crisis. He would be better soon.

But he did not get better. Days slid into weeks, and still he lay there. When I spoke of recovery he “turned his face unto the wall”—weary of living. Once, when he had lain thus a whole morning, hardly speaking a word, I began to feel growing palpable the truth which day by day I had thrust behind me—that ere now people had died of mere soul-sickness, without any bodily disease. What if, despite the physician’s assurances, he might be sinking—my friend, my pride, all my comfort in this life—passing from it and from me into another, where, let me call never so wildly, he could not come back to me any more.

How could I save him?

There seemed but one way; I sprang at it; stayed not to think if it were right or wrong. In half an hour, without saying a word to human being, I was on my way to Ursula March.

She sat knitting in the parlour alone. She met me cordially—said she was glad to see me—that she had not seen either of us lately.

“No wonder you did not see us, Miss March; John has been very ill, is ill now—almost dying.”

I hurled the words at her. I could see her shiver.

“Ill!—and no one ever told me!”

“You? How could it affect you? To me, now”—and my savage words broke down in a burst of misery—“nothing in this world to me is worth a straw, in comparison with John. If he dies—”

I let loose the flood of my misery. I dashed it over her, that she might see it—feel it. For was she not the cause?

She came to me, and took my hand. Hers was very cold, and her voice trembled much.

“Be comforted. He is young, and God is very merciful.”

She could say no more, but sat down, nervously twisting and untwisting her fingers.

“His bodily sickness is conquered—it is his mind. Oh,

Miss March!" and I looked up at her like a wretch begging for life. "Do *you* not know of what my brother is dying?"

"Dying!" A shudder passed over her—but I relented not.

"While in health he could fight against this—this which I must not speak of; but now his health is gone. He cannot rally. Without some change, I see clearly, even I who love him better than anyone can love him——"

She stirred a little here.

"Far better," I repeated; "for while John does *not* love me best, he to me is more than anyone else in the world. Yet even I have given up hope, unless—but I have no right to say more."

There was no need. She began to understand. A deep, soft colour dawned all over her face and neck. She looked at me once—just once—with a mute inquiry.

"It is the truth, Miss March—ay, ever since last year. You will respect it? You will, you shall respect it!"

She bent her head in acquiescence—that was all. She had not uttered a syllable. Her silence almost drove me wild.

"What! not one word? not one ordinary message from a friend to a friend?—one who is lying ill, too!"

Still silence.

I left her—left her where she sat, and went my way.

After a season, I calmed myself enough to dare entering that quiet sick-chamber where no one ever entered but Jael and me. The old woman met me at the door.

"Come in gently, Phineas; I do think there is a change."

John was sitting up in bed. New life shone in his eyes, in his whole aspect.

"Phineas, how tired you look; it is time you were in bed."

The old way of speaking—the old, natural voice.

"You must not grieve over me any more, dear lad; to-morrow, please God! I mean to be quite well again."

Amidst all my joy, I marvelled over what could be the cause of so miraculous a change.

"You would smile if I told you—only a dream. Do you know, Phineas, she has been sitting by me, just where you sit now."

"She?"

"Ursula. She sat there, talking. She told me she knew I loved her—loved her so much that I was dying for her; that it was very wrong; that I must rise up and do my work in the world—do it for Heaven's sake, not for hers; that a true man

should live, and live nobly, for the woman he loves. And, Phineas, I will do as she bade me; I will arise and walk."

And so he did. He slept quietly as an infant all that night. Next morning I found him up and dressed. Looking like a spectre, indeed; but with health, courage, and hope in his eyes. Even my father noticed it.

"Why, thee art picking up, lad! Thee'lt be a man again in no time."

"I hope so. And a better man than ever I was before."

In the afternoon my father went and smoked his peaceful pipe in the garden. John lay on an extempore sofa, made of three chairs and the window-sill. I read to him. Just as I was stealthily glancing at his face, fancying his thoughts were wandering—Jael burst in.

"John Halifax, there be a woman asking for thee."

It was only Mrs. Jessop. At sight of him, standing up, tall, and gaunt, and pale, the good lady's eyes brimmed over.

"You have been very ill, my poor boy! I had no idea—why did you not let us know—the doctor and me? You must be careful—very careful of yourself."

"He will, Mrs. Jessop. Or, if not, he has many to take care of him. Many to whom his life is most precious and most dear."

I spoke abruptly, but her gentle answer seemed at once to understand and forgive me.

"I well believe that, Mr. Fletcher. And I think Mr. Halifax hardly knows how much we—all—esteem him." And she took John's hand. "You must make haste and get well now. My husband will come and see you to-morrow. For Ursula, my dear child sends you this."

It was a little note, unsealed. The superscription was simply his name, in her clear handwriting—"John Halifax."

"I will take your message back. She told me what she had said to you."

Ay, all the world might have read those simple lines—

"MY DEAR FRIEND,

"I did not know till yesterday that you had been ill. I have not forgotten how kind you were to my poor father. I should like to come and see you if you would allow me.

"Yours sincerely,

"URSULA MARCH."

"Well, what shall I say to my child?"

"Say"—he half rose, struggling to speak—"ask her to come."

Mrs. Jessop went away. And now for a long hour we waited—scarcely moving. My father came in from the garden, and settled to his afternoon doze; but I think John hardly noticed him—nor I.

At length Ursula came. John rose to meet her. They did not speak, but only clasped hands. In his first look she might have seen, have felt, that I had told her the truth. For hers—but it dropped down, down, as Ursula March's clear glance had never dropped before. My father awoke—rubbed his eyes—became aware of a lady's presence—rubbed them again, and sat staring. John led Ursula to the old man's chair.

"Mr. Fletcher, this is Miss March, a friend of mine, who, hearing I was ill, out of her great kindness——"

His voice faltered. Miss March added, in a low tone, "I am an orphan, and he was kind to my dear father."

Abel Fletcher nodded—adjusted his spectacles—eyed her all over—and nodded again; slowly, gravely, with a satisfied inspection.

"If thee be a friend of John's, welcome to my house. Wilt thee sit down?"

Offering his hand, my father placed her in his own arm-chair.

"Wilt thee stay, and have a dish of tea with us?"

So it came to pass that in an hour's space our parlour beheld the strangest sight it had beheld since—ah! no wonder that when she took her place at the table's foot, and gave him his dish of tea with her own hand—her pretty lady's hand—my old father started, as if it had been another than Miss March who was sitting there. But Mrs. Jessop engaged him in talk. The doctor, too, came in after tea, and the old folk all settled themselves for a cosy chat, taking very little notice of us three.

Miss March sat at a little table near the window, admiring some hyacinths that Mrs. Jessop had brought us.

"They are very beautiful," I heard John's voice answer. "It is growing too dark to judge of colours; but the scent is delicious, even here."

"I could move the table closer to you."

"Thank you—let me do it—will you sit down?"

She did so, after a very slight hesitation, by John's side.

Neither spoke—but sat quietly there, with the sunset light on their two heads.

"There is a new moon to-night. I hope——" said Ursula, breaking the pause, and then stopping.

"What do you hope?"

"That long before this moon has grown old you will be quite strong again."

"Thank you! I hope so too. I have need for strength, God knows!" He sighed heavily.

"And you will have what you need, so as to do your work in the world."

The room darkened so fast that I could not see them; but their voices seemed a great way off.

"I intend," John said, "as soon as I am able, to leave Norton Bury, and go abroad for some time."

"Where?"

"To America. It is the best country for a young man who has neither money, nor kindred, nor position—nothing, in fact, but his own right hand with which to carve out his own fortune—as I will, if I can."

She murmured something about this being "quite right".

"I am glad you think so. In any case, I must quit England. I have reasons for so doing." "What reasons?"

"I am going because there has befallen me a great trouble, which, while I stay here, I cannot get free from or overcome. I do not wish to sink under it—I had rather, as you said, 'do my work in the world' as a man ought. Do you not think I am right in thus meeting, and trying to conquer, an inevitable ill?"

"Is it inevitable?"

"Hush!" John answered wildly. "Don't reason with me—you cannot judge—you do not know. It is enough that I must go. But you called me 'friend', and I would like you to think kindly of me always. Because—because——" and his voice shook—broke down utterly. "God love thee and take care of thee, wherever I may go!"

"John, stay!"

When Jael brought in lights I saw John rise, and Miss March with him. Holding her hand, he led her across the room.

"Eh?" said my father, gazing at them from over his spectacles.

John spoke brokenly. "We have no parents, neither she nor I. Bless her, for she has promised to be my wife."
And the old man blessed her with tears.

CHAPTER VII

John was bent on a trying errand. He was going to communicate to Mr. Brithwood of the Mythe, Ursula's legal guardian and trustee, the fact that she had promised him her hand.

We reached the Mythe House; the footman brought word that Mr. Brithwood would be at liberty in the justice-room.

Richard Brithwood sat behind his office-table.

"Oh—Mr. Halifax. Good-morning."

John returned the salutation. "I should be glad, sir, of a few minutes' speech with you."

"Certainly—perhaps you'll dispatch your business; the sooner the better."

"It will not take long. Mr. Brithwood, I have the honour of bearing a message to you from Miss Ursula March."

"That lady, sir, has chosen to put herself away from her family, and her family can hold no further intercourse with her," said the squire, loftily.

"I am aware of that," was the reply.

"Are you? And pray what right may *you* have to be acquainted with Miss March's private concerns?"

"The right—which, indeed, was the purport of her message to you—that in a few months I shall become her husband."

The squire burst into a hoarse laugh. "Well, that is the best joke I ever did hear. Where are your lawyers, your marriage settlements, hey? I say, young man—ha! ha! I should like to know what you can want with me, Miss March's trustee?"

"Nothing whatever. Miss March, as you are aware, is by her father's will left perfectly free in her choice of marriage; and she has chosen. I came to tell you, as her cousin and the executor of this will, that she is about to become my wife. Miss March has a fortune and I have none; and though I wish that difference were on the other side, yet it shall not hinder my marrying her. I wished to have everything clear between myself and you, her nearest relative. You now know exactly

how the matter stands. I will detain you no longer—I have nothing more to say.”

“But I have,” roared out the squire. “Stop a minute. Tell Ursula March she may marry you, or any other vagabond she pleases—it’s no business of mine. But her fortune is my business, and it’s in my hands too. Not one penny shall she get out of my fingers as long as I can keep hold of it.”

John bowed, his hand on the door. “As you please, Mr. Brithwood. That was not the subject of our interview. Good-morning.” And we were away.

Re-crossing the iron gates, John breathed freely.

“That’s over—all is well.”

And so, in the late autumn, one golden morning, Ursula walked quietly up the Abbey aisle in her plain white muslin gown; and John and she plighted their faithful vows, no one being present except the Jessops and I. They then went away for a brief holiday—entirely happy—husband and wife together.

John having brought his wife home, I went to see them in their own house. It was an old dwelling-house, in the middle of the town; the front windows looking on the street, the garden behind shut in by four brick walls. Yet the gloomy outside being once passed, the house looked wonderfully bright and clean. Though only a few rooms were furnished, and that very simply, almost poorly, all was done with taste and care.

They were out gardening, John Halifax and his wife. Neither heard me come till I stood close by.

“Phineas, welcome, welcome!” He wrung my hand fervently, many times; so did Ursula, blushing rosy red. They both called me “brother”, and both were as fond and warm as any brother and sister could be.

John’s garden was somewhat of a waste, divided between ancient cabbage-beds, empty flower-beds, and great old orchard-trees, very thinly laden with fruit.

“We’ll make them bear better next year,” said John hopefully. He looked round his little domain with the eye of a master, and put his arm round his wife’s shoulders.

We all walked up and down the garden, talking over a thousand plans for making ends meet in that little household. To their young hopefulness even poverty itself became a jest.

“We mean,” said John gaily, “to be two living Essays on the Advantages of Poverty. We are not going to be afraid of it or ashamed of it. We don’t care who knows it.”

"I should think not," Ursula cried. "Besides, we have few wants, and we can easily reduce our wants to our havings."

We went in, and, after tea, Ursula arranged her books, some on stained shelves, and some on an old spinet which John had picked up.

"It caught my fancy. Do you know, Ursula, I have a faint remembrance that once, on such a thing as this, my mother used to play?"

He spoke in a low voice; Ursula stole up to him.

"You never told me anything about your mother?"

"Dear, I had little to tell. Long ago you knew whom you were going to marry—John Halifax, who had no friends, no kindred, whose parents left him nothing but his name."

"And have you nothing belonging to them?"

"Only one thing. Should you like to see it?"

"Very much." She spoke slowly, and with slight hesitation. "It was hard for him not to have known his parents," she added, when John had left the room.

He reappeared. "Here, Ursula, is all I have of my parents. No one has seen it, except Phineas there, until now."

He held in his hand the little Greek Testament which he had showed me years before. His wife touched it softly and tenderly. He showed her the fly-leaf; she looked over the inscription, and then repeated it aloud.

"*'Guy Halifax, gentleman'*. I thought—I thought——"

Her manner betrayed a pleased surprise.

"You thought that I was only a labourer's son; or—no-body's. Well, does it signify?"

"No," she cried, as she looked at him with all her heart in her eyes. "No, it does *not* signify. Were your father the king on his throne, or the beggar in the streets, it would be all the same to me; you would still be yourself—*my* husband—*my* John Halifax."

John walked home with me—a pleasure which was insisted upon both by him and Ursula. For from the very first of her betrothal there had been a thorough brother-and-sisterly bond established between her and me. John and I talked a little about her—and of good Mrs. Tod's delight at seeing her, when last week they had stayed two days at Enderley.

He began telling me about the cloth-mill, which he had been over once again when they were at Rose Cottage.

"And, do you know, a notion came into my head that, instead

of that great water-wheel, it might be worked by steam. I have got the plan of the machinery in my head already. And I do believe, by common patience and skill, a man might make his fortune with it at those Enderley cloth-mills."

"Suppose you try!" I said.

"I wish I could try—if it were only practicable. The mill belongs to Lord Luxmore. His steward works it. Now, if one could get to be a foreman or overseer——"

"Try—you can do anything you try."

"No, I must not think of it," said he, steadily. "I must not, for a mere fancy, give up the work that lies under my hand. What of the tan-yard, Phineas?"

"My father missed you a good deal. He looks anxious, I think. He vexes himself more than he needs about business."

"Don't let him. I'll manage the tan-yard; you know—and he knows too—that everything which can be done for us all I shall do. All trade is bad just now. Never fear, we'll weather the storm—I'm not afraid."

At my own door he left me. "Lad, take care of thyself, though I'm not by to see. Remember, I am just as much thy tyrant as if I were living here still."

I smiled, and he went his way home.

The winter and spring passed calmly by. I had much ill-health, and could go out very little; but they came constantly to me, John and Ursula, especially the latter. In the long mid-summer days I got into the habit of creeping over to John's home, and sitting for hours under the apple-trees in his garden. It was now different from the wilderness he found it; the old trees were pruned and tended, and young ones planted.

I used to watch Ursula, morning after morning, superintending her domain, with her faithful attendant Jem. In the summer evenings she would be at the window sewing—but so placed that with one glance she could see down the street where John was coming. They were very happy in those early days of poverty; when their whole world was bounded by the dark old house and the garden, with its four high walls.

In December, 1802, their baby was born—Muriel Joy Halifax. And on February 9th she formally received her name. We all dined at John's house—Dr. and Mrs. Jessop, my father and I.

Afterwards we drew round the fire, or watched outside the

window the falling snow. "It has not snowed these two months," said John, "never since the day our little girl was born."

And at that moment, as if she heard herself mentioned, the little maid upstairs set up a cry. My father gave a start—he had never seen or expressed a wish to see John's daughter. We knew he did not like babies. Ursula rose and stole away. Abel Fletcher looked after her, and then began to say something about going back to the tan-yard.

"Do not, pray do not leave us," John entreated; "Ursula wants to show you our little lady." And then Mrs. Halifax entered, holding in her arms her baby-daughter.

"She might well come in a snow-storm," said Mrs. Jessop, taking the child. "She is just like snow, so soft and white."

"And as soundless—she hardly ever cries. There, she has caught your dress fast. Now, was there ever a two months' old baby so quick at noticing things? and she does it all with her fingers—she touches everything."

"I never knew a child so susceptible of sounds," said John.

Ursula showed Muriel's eyelashes—very long for such a baby—and descanted on the colour of her eyes. "I think they are like her father's. But we have not many opportunities of judging, for she hardly ever opens them—we should often fancy her asleep, but for that little soft coo; and then she will wake up all of a sudden. There now! do you see her? Come to the window, my beauty! and show Dr. Jessop your bonny brown eyes."

They were bonny eyes! but there was something strange in their expression—or rather, in their want of it. Many babies have a vacant stare—but this was no stare, only a look of quiet blankness—an *unseeing* look. It caught Dr. Jessop's notice.

"Well, whose are they like—her father's or mine?"

"I—I can't exactly tell. I could judge better by candle-light." His manner was hesitating and troubled. John noticed it.

"Love, give her to me." He took his baby, and gazed long and intently into her little face. "Phineas, give me the candle."

Lulled by her father's voice, Muriel opened her eyes wide. Dr. Jessop passed the candle before them many times, once so close that it almost touched her face; but the full, quiet eyes never blenched nor closed. He set the light down.

"Doctor!" whispered the father. He snatched the candle, and tried the experiment himself.

"She does not see at all. Can she be blind?"

"Born blind."

"*Blind!*" The word was uttered softly, hardly above a breath, yet the mother heard it. "John! John! Oh, John! it is so hard. Our pretty one—our own little child!"

John did not speak, but only held her to him—close and fast.

"It is more an affliction to you than it will be to her, poor pet!" said Mrs. Jessop, as she wiped her eyes. "She will not miss what she never knew."

But the mother could not take that consolation yet. She walked to and fro, and stood rocking her baby, mute indeed, but with tears falling in showers. Someone came behind her, and placed her in the arm-chair, gently. It was my father. He sat down by her, taking her hand.

"Grieve not, Ursula. I had a little brother who was blind. He was the happiest creature I ever knew."

My father sighed. We all marvelled to see the wonderful softness which had come into him.

"Give me thy child for a minute." Ursula laid it across his knees; he put his hand solemnly on the baby-breast. "God bless this little one! Ay, and she shall be blessed."

These words struck us all. We looked at little Muriel as if the blessing were already upon her.

"Now, children, I must go home," said my father.

"You will come again soon?" begged Ursula.

"Perhaps. We never know. Be a good wife to thy husband, my girl. And, John, never be thou harsh to her, nor too hard upon her little failings. She is but young—but young."

He sighed again. It was plain to see he was thinking of another than Ursula.

When we got indoors I asked him if I should come and sit with him till his bed-time.

"No—no; thee looks tired, and I have a business letter to write. Better go to thy bed as usual."

I bade him good-night, and was going, when he called me back.

"How old art thee, Phineas—twenty-four or five?"

"Twenty-five, father."

"Eh! so much?" He put his hand on my shoulder, and looked down on me kindly, even tenderly. "Thee art but

weakly still, but thee must pick up, and live to be as old a man as thy father. Good-night. God be with thee, my son!"

I left him. I was happy. Once I had never expected my old father and I would have loved one another so dearly.

In the middle of the night Jael came into my room. At ten o'clock, when she had locked up the house, she had come as usual to the parlour door, to tell my father it was bed-time. He did not answer, being apparently busy writing. So she went away. Half an hour afterwards she came again. He sat there still—he had not moved. He seemed intently gazing on what he had written. It ran thus:—

"GOOD FRIEND,

"To-morrow I shall be——"

O dear father! On that to-morrow thou wert with God!

CHAPTER VIII

It was the year 1812. I had lived for ten years in my adopted brother's house, whither he had brought me on the day of my father's funeral; entreating that I should never leave it again. It was discovered that the profits of the tanning trade had long been merely nominal—that, of necessity, the tan-yard must be sold, and the business confined entirely to the flour-mill. I wished to try and work for my living, if that were possible. But John Halifax would not hear of that.

He had several children now. First, and loudest always, was Guy—born the year after Muriel. He was very like his mother, and her darling. After him came two more, Edwin and Walter. But Muriel still remained as "sister".

She was from her very babyhood a living peace. And such she was to us all, during those ten struggling years, when our household had much to contend with, much to endure. "*Ay, and she shall be blessed,*" had said my dear father. So she was. From her, or for her, her parents never had to endure a single pain.

The spring of 1812 was long remembered in our family. Scarlet fever went through the house—safely, but leaving much care behind.

"Thank God it is over!" said John. "And now we must try

and make a little holiday. I know what we'll do. We'll go for three months to Longfield."

This Longfield was only a small farm-house, about six miles off, where once we had been to tea, and where ever since we had longed to live.

"Hearken, children! father says we shall go for three whole months to live at Longfield."

The three boys set up a shout of ecstasy.

"But what does my little daughter say?" said the father, turning—as he always turned, at the lightest touch of those soft fingers creeping along his coat sleeve. "What will Muriel do at Longfield?"

"Muriel will sit all day and hear the birds sing."

"So she shall, my blessing!" He often called her his "blessing", which in truth she was—this child of his youth—his first-born and his dearest.

"Oh, how I wish we could always live in the country!" the mother said.

"Do you? Well, perhaps we may manage it some time."

"When our ship comes in—namely, that money which Richard Brithwood will not pay. Perhaps the money will come some day when we least expect it; then John shall have his heart's desire, and start the cloth-mills at Enderley."

John smiled, half-sadly. "No, love; I shall never be 'patriarch of the valley', as Phineas used to call it. The yew-hedge is too thick for me, eh, Phineas?"

"No!" cried Ursula—we had told her this little incident of our boyhood—"you have got half through it already. Everybody in Norton Bury knows and respects you. I am sure, Phineas, you might have heard a pin fall at the meeting last night when he spoke against hanging the Luddites. And such a shout as rose when he ended! Then, see how he is consulted, and his opinion followed, by rich folk as well as poor folk, all about the neighbourhood. I am sure John is as popular, and has as much influence as many a member of parliament."

John said nothing. He rarely did say anything about himself. The glory of his life was its unconsciousness.

"There's Muriel," said the father, listening.

Often thus the child slipped away, and we heard all over the house the sweet sounds of "Muriel's voice", as someone had called the old harpsicord. When almost a baby she would feel her way to it, and find out first harmonies, then tunes,

with that quickness and delicacy of ear peculiar to the blind.

"Hark! she has stopped playing. Guy, run and bring your sister here," said the father.

Guy came back with a story of two gentlemen in the parlour, one of whom had patted his head, "such a grand gentleman!"

To this "grand" personage John bowed formally, but his wife flushed up in surprised recognition.

"It is so long since I had the happiness of meeting Miss March, that I conclude Mrs. Halifax has forgotten me?"

"No, Lord Luxmore; allow me to introduce my husband."

"Mr. Halifax, I have long wished to know you. Mrs. Halifax, my daughter encouraged me to pay this impromptu visit."

Here ensued polite inquiries after Lady Caroline Brithwood; we learned that she was just returned from abroad, and was entertaining, at the Mythe House, her father and brother.

"Pardon—I was forgetting my son—Lord Ravenel."

The youth thus presented merely bowed. He was about eighteen or so, with thin features and large soft eyes.

"Mrs. Halifax, I have heard your husband is a first-rate public speaker."

The wife smiled, wife-like; but John said hurriedly—

"I have no pretension or ambition of the kind. I merely now and then try to put plain truths, or what I believe to be such, before the people, in a form they are able to understand."

"Ay, that is it. My dear sir, the people must be led, like a flock of sheep. We"—a lordly "we!"—"are their proper shepherds. But, then, we want a middle-class—at least, an occasional voice from it, a——"

"A shepherd's dog, to give tongue," said John, dryly. "In short, a public orator. In the House, or out of it?"

"Both. But, before we commence that subject, there was another on which I desired my agent, Mr. Brown, to obtain your valuable opinion."

"You mean, when, yesterday, he offered me, by your lordship's express desire, the lease, lately fallen in, of your cloth-mills at Enderley?"

"And all will be arranged, I trust. Brown says you have long wished to take the mills; I shall be most happy to have you for a tenant."

"My lord, as I told your agent, it is impossible."

"If I may ask—why is it impossible?"

"I have no wish to disguise the reason: it is because I have no capital."

Lord Luxmore looked surprised. "Surely—excuse me, but I had the honour of being well acquainted with the late Mr. March—surely, your wife's fortune——"

Ursula rose. "His wife's fortune!—(John, let me say it!—I will, I must!)—of his wife's fortune, Lord Luxmore, he has never received one farthing. Richard Brithwood keeps it back, and my husband would work day and night for me and our children rather than go to law."

The earl was evidently puzzled and annoyed. "Such extraordinary conduct," he muttered. "I must really have a little conversation with Brithwood. Mr. Halifax," turning quickly round to him, "you would be of great use to us in Parliament. Will you—I like plain speaking—will you enter it?"

Enter Parliament! John Halifax in Parliament!

"I can bring you in at once, for a borough near here—my family borough. Mrs. Halifax, would you not like to see your husband member for Kingswell?"

"Kingswell!" It was a tumble-down village, where John held and managed for me the sole remnant of landed property which my poor father had left me. "Kingswell! why, there are not a dozen houses in the place."

"The fewer the better, my dear madam. The election would cost me scarcely any—trouble; and the country be vastly the gainer by your husband's talents and probity. He is made to shine as a politician. Mr. Halifax, you will accept my borough?"

"Not on any consideration your lordship could offer me."

Lord Luxmore scarcely credited his ears. "My dear sir—may I again inquire your reasons?"

"I have several; one will suffice. Though I wish to gain influence, the last thing I should desire would be political influence."

"You might possibly escape that unwelcome possession," returned the earl. "Half the House of Commons is made up of harmless dummies, who vote as we bid them."

"A character, my lord, for which I am decidedly unfitted. Until the people are allowed honestly to choose their own honest representatives, I must decline being of that number. Shall we dismiss the subject?" "With pleasure, sir."

The earl stayed some time longer, and then bowed himself

away, carrying with him the shy, gentle Lord Ravenel, who had spoken scarcely six words the whole time.

When he was gone the father and mother seemed both relieved. But his lordship had left an uncomfortable impression behind him. It lasted even until that quiet hour when, the children being all in bed, we elders closed in round the fire.

"What's that?" We all started, as a sudden ring at the bell pealed through the house, frightening the children in their beds. All for a mere letter, too, brought by a lackey of Lord Luxmore's. Having ascertained this fact, the mother ran upstairs to quiet her little ones. When she came down, John gave her the letter without a word.

"MR. JOHN HALIFAX.

"Sir,

"Your wife, Ursula Halifax, having some time since attained the age fixed by her late father as her majority, I will, within a month after date, pay over to your order all moneys, principal and interest, accruing to her, and hitherto left in my hands, as trustec, according to the will of the late Henry March, Esquire.

"I am, sir,

"Yours, &c.,

"RICHARD BRITHWOOD."

"Oh, John—John! now you need not work so hard!"

That was his wife's first cry, as she clung to him almost in tears. He too was a good deal agitated.

"Thank God! In any case, you are quite safe now—you and the children!"

"We are safe—quite safe—when we have you. Oh, Phineas! make him see it as I do. Make him understand that it will be the happiest day in his wife's life when she knows him happy in his heart's desire."

Not many weeks afterwards we went to live at Longfield, which henceforth became the family home. It was but a small place when we first came there. It led out of the high road by a field-gate—the White Gate; from which a narrow path wound down to a stream, thence up a green slope to the house; a mere farm-house, nothing more.

One September morning Mrs. Halifax, the children, and I were down at the stream, planning a bridge across it, and a

sort of stable, where John's horse might be put up. With all the necessary improvements at Longfield, with the large settlement that John insisted upon making on his wife and children, before he would use in his business any portion of her fortune, we found we were by no means so rich as to make any great change in our way of life advisable. And, after all, the mother's best luxuries were to see her children merry and strong, and to know her husband was now placed beyond doubt in the position he had always longed for; for was he not this very day gone to sign the lease of Enderley Mills?

Mrs. Halifax stood in the little dell which the stream had made, Walter in her arms. Her right hand kept firm hold of Guy, who was paddling barefoot in the stream; Edwin, the only one of the boys who never gave any trouble, was soberly digging. Muriel sat as usual, petting one of her doves, when I heard the child say to herself: "Father's coming."

The next minute a general shout echoed, "Father's here!"

He stood, lifting one after the other up in his arms; having a kiss and a merry word for all. Ursula came, and received the embrace without which he never left her or returned.

"All rightly settled, John?"

"Quite settled."

"I am so glad."

After tea we all turned out, as was our wont on summer evenings; the children playing about; while the father and mother strolled up and down the field-path, arm in arm. Thus they would walk and talk together in the twilight for hours.

In the morning John had ridden off early—to the flour-mill, which he still kept on, together with the old house at Norton Bury. At dinner-time he came home, saying he was going out again immediately.

A few minutes after, Ursula asked me if I would go with John to Kingswell.

"The election takes place to-day, and he thinks it right to be there. He will meet Mr. Brithwood and Lord Luxmore; and I would like his brother to be near him."

I went to Kingswell, riding John's brown mare, he himself walking by my side. It was not often that we were thus alone together, and I enjoyed it much. He was telling me about Enderley Mill, and all his plans there—of the new inventions he meant to apply in cloth-weaving; and how he and his wife had agreed together to live for some years to come at little

Longfield, strictly within their settled income, that all the remainder of his capital might go to the improvement of Enderley Mills and mill-people.

"I shall be master of nearly a hundred men and women. Think what good we may do! She has half a dozen plans on foot already."

"Was the dinner in the barn, next Monday, her plan, too?"

"Partly. I thought we would begin a sort of yearly festival for the old tan-yard people, and those about the flour-mill, and the Kingswell tenants."

These were about a dozen poor families, whom, when our mortgage fell in, he had lured out of Sally Watkins' miserable alley to these old houses, where they had fresh country air, and space enough to live wholesomely.

"You ought to be proud of your tenants, Phineas. I assure you, they form quite a contrast to their neighbours, who are Lord Luxmore's."

"And his voters likewise, I suppose?"

"Do you know, Phineas, I might last week have sold your houses for double price? They are valuable, this election year, since your five tenants are the only voters in Kingswell who are not likewise tenants of Lord Luxmore. Don't you see how the matter stands?"

It was not difficult, for that sort of game was played all over England, winked at by those who had political influence to sell or obtain, until the Reform Bill opened up the election system in all its enormity.

"Of course I knew you would not sell your houses; and I shall use every possible influence I have to prevent your tenants selling their votes. The sort of thing that this Kingswell election bids fair to be, is what any honest Englishman ought to set his face against, and prevent if he can."

"Can you?" "I do not feel sure, but I mean to try."

I foresaw that whatever John was about to do, it must necessarily be something that would run directly counter to Lord Luxmore—and he had only just signed the lease of Enderley Mills. Still, if right to be done, he ought to do it at all costs; and I knew his wife would say so.

We came to the foot of Kingswell Hill. A carriage overtook us here; in it were two gentlemen, one of whom bowed in a friendly manner to John. He returned it.

"Who is he?"

"Sir Ralph Oldtower, from whom I bought Longfield. A true English gentleman, and I respect him. Hollo, there! Matthew Hales, have they made you drunk already?"

The man—he was an old workman of ours—touched his hat, and tried to walk steadily past "the master".

"I thought it would be so! I doubt if there is a voter in Kingswell who has not got a bribe."

So saying, he went into the large parlour of the Luxmore Arms, where the election was going on.

A very simple thing, that election! Sir Ralph Oldtower, who was sheriff, sat at a table, with his son, the young man who had been with him in the carriage; near them were Mr. Brithwood of the Mythe, and the Earl of Luxmore. The room was pretty well filled with farmers' labourers and the like. The sheriff saw John at once, and bowed courteously. So did young Mr. Herbert Oldtower, so did the Earl of Luxmore. Richard Brithwood alone took no notice.

Sir Ralph began to read the writ of election, and briefly stated that Richard Brithwood, Esquire, of the Mythe, would nominate a candidate.

The candidate was Gerard Vermilye, Esquire. Mr. Thomas Brown, steward of the Earl of Luxmore, seconded the nomination. Sir Ralph Oldtower again rose.

"Gentlemen and electors, there being no other candidate proposed, nothing is left me but to declare Gerard Vermilye, Esquire——"

John Halifax made his way to the table. "Sir Ralph, pardon my interruption, but may I speak a few words?"

"Mr. Halifax, you are a freeman of Kingswell?"

"I am. You will find in the charter a clause, seldom put in force, that the daughter of a freeman can confer the freedom on her husband. My wife's late father, Mr. Henry March, was a burgess of Kingswell. I claimed my rights, and registered, this year."

Lord Luxmore looked considerably surprised. "My dear sir, may I request so useful a vote and so powerful an interest as yours, for our friend, Mr. Vermilye?"

"My lord, it is not my intention, except at the last extremity, to vote at all. If I do, it will certainly not be for Mr. Brithwood's nominee. Sir Ralph, I doubt if, under some circumstances, which by your permission I am about to state, Mr. Gerard Vermilye can keep his seat, even if elected."

"Mr. Halifax, what have you to allege against Mr. Brithwood's nominee?"

"First, his qualification. He has not three hundred, nor one hundred a year. He is deeply in debt, at Norton Bury and elsewhere. Warrants are out against him; and only as an M.P. can he be safe from outlawry. Add to this, an offence common as daylight, yet which the law dare not wink at when made patent—that he has bribed every one of the fifteen electors of Kingswell; and I think I have said enough to convince any honest Englishman that Mr. Gerard Vermilye is not fit to represent them in Parliament."

Here a loud cheer broke from the crowd at the door.

"Herbert"—the sheriff turned to his son—"are you acquainted with any of these facts?" Mr. Herbert Oldtower looked uncomfortable.

"Answer," said his father. "Gentlemen, and my worthy friends, will you hear Mr. Oldtower, whom you all know? Herbert, are these accusations true?"

"I am afraid so," said the young man gravely.

"My lord," said the baronet, "however desirous I am to satisfy the family to whom this borough belongs, it is impossible for me to see with satisfaction—even though I cannot prevent—the election of any person so unfit to serve His Majesty. If, indeed, there were another candidate, so that the popular feeling might decide this matter——"

"Sir Ralph," said John Halifax determinedly, "being a landholder, and likewise a freeman of this borough, I claim the right of nominating a second candidate. I beg to nominate Mr. Herbert Oldtower."

A decided sensation at the upper half of the room. At the lower half an unanimous cheer; for among our county families there were few so warmly respected as the Oldtowers.

Sir Ralph rose, perplexed. "I trust that no one present will suppose I was aware of Mr. Halifax's intention. Nor, I understand, was Mr. Oldtower. My son must speak for himself."

Mr. Oldtower said, that in this conjuncture, and being personally unacquainted with both Mr. Brithwood and the Earl of Luxmore, he felt no hesitation in accepting the honour offered to him.

"That being the case," said his father, "I have only to fulfil my duty as public officer to the Crown."

Amidst some confusion, a show of hands was called for; and then a cry rose of "Go to the poll!"

"Go to the poll!" shouted Mr. Brithwood. "This is a family borough. There has not been a poll here these fifty years. Sir Ralph, your son's mad."

Sir Ralph drew himself up haughtily, and turned away, addressing the general meeting. "Gentlemen, the poll will be held this afternoon, according to the suggestion of my neighbour here."

"Sir Ralph Oldtower has convenient neighbours," remarked Lord Luxmore.

"Of my neighbour, Mr. Halifax," repeated the old baronet, more emphatically. "A gentleman for whom, ever since I have known him, I have entertained the highest respect."

A contested election at Kingswell! such a thing had not been known within the memory of the oldest inhabitant. The fifteen voters were altogether bewildered by a sense of their own importance. Also, by a new and startling fact—which I found Mr. Halifax trying to impress upon a few of them, gathered in the churchyard—that a man's vote ought to be the expression of his own conscientious opinion.

The poll was held in the church—a not uncommon usage in country boroughs. The churchwarden was placed in the clerk's desk to receive votes. The sheriff sat in his family pew. Lord Luxmore and Mr. Brithwood talked and laughed loudly on the other side of the church.

The poll began in perfect silence. One after the other, three farmers went up and voted for Mr. Vermilye. Then came up the big, gray-headed Jacob Baines, once the ringleader of the bread-riots. He was the faithfulest of all John's people.

He pulled his forelock to Sir Ralph. "Your honour, I be a poor man. I lives in one o' my lord's houses. I hanna paid no rent for a year. Mr. Brown zays to me, 'Jacob, vote for Vermilye, and I'll forgive 'ee the rent, and here be two pound ten to start again wi'.' So, as I zays to Matthew Hales (he be Mr. Halifax's tenant, your honour, and my lord's steward ha' paid 'un nigh four pound for his vote), I sure us be poor men, and his lordship a lord and all that—it's no harm, I reckon."

"Hollo! cut it short, you rascal—you're stopping the poll. Vote, I say."

"Ay, ay, squire;" and the old fellow pulled his hair again to Mr. Brithwood. "Wait till I ha' got shut o' these." And

he counted out of his ragged pockets a handful of guineas.

"Three was paid to I, two to Will Horrocks, and the rest to Matthew Hales. But, sir, we has changed our minds; and please, would 'ee give back the money to them as owns it?"

"Still, my honest friend——"

"Thank 'ee, Sir Ralph, that's it; we be honest; we couldn't look the master in the face else. Twelve years ago, come Michaelmas, he kept some on us from starving—maybe worse. We bean't going to turn rascals on's hands now. Now I'll vote, sir—and it won't be for Vermilye."

A smothered murmur of applause greeted old Jacob, as he marched back down the aisle. It must have been a great surprise to Lord Luxmore, when, the poll being closed, its result was found thus: Out of the fifteen votes, six were for Mr. Vermilye, nine for his opponent. Mr. Herbert Oldtower was therefore duly elected as member for the borough of Kingswell.

"My lord," said John Halifax, "those workmen of mine, who are your tenants—I am aware what usually results when tenants in arrear vote against their landlords—if, without taking any harsher measures, your agent will apply to me for the rent——"

"Sir, my agent will use his own discretion."

"Then I rely on your lordship's kindness—your sense of honour."

"Honour is only spoken of between equals," said the earl, haughtily. "But on one thing Mr. Halifax may always rely—my excellent memory."

Lord Luxmore departed. We took our diverse ways; Sir Ralph giving Mr. Halifax a hearty invitation to the Manor-house; and, shaking hands with a stately cordiality, the old man took his leave.

"John, you have made a step in the world to-day."

"Have I?" he said absently, as he went along.

"What will your wife say?"

"My wife? bless her! It will make no difference to her—though it might to me. She married me in my low estate—but some day, God willing, no lady in the land shall be higher than my Ursula."

The Monday after the election was the annual holiday John had planned for his workpeople. This first feast at Longfield was a most merry day. The men and their families came about noon. Soon after, they all sat down to dinner, an open-air feast

in the shelter of a hay-rick. In the afternoon, all rambled about as they liked. Then the mother went among the poorer mothers there; talked to one, comforted another, counselled a third, and listened to all.

It was already evening when we all came and sat down on the long bench under the walnut-tree.

"I think they have had a happy day, John. They will work all the better to-morrow." "I am quite sure of it."

"Father, I hear the click of the gate. There's somebody coming," said Muriel.

"'Tis only a poor boy—who can he be?"

"What do you want, my lad?" "I wants Jacob Baines."

"You'll find him with the rest, in front of that hay-rick, over his pipe and ale." The lad was off like a shot.

"He is from Kingswell, I think. Can anything be the matter, John?"

"I will go and see." He went, apparently rather anxious. Soon Ursula went after him. I followed her.

We saw, close by the hay-rick, a group of men, angrily talking. The mothers were just joining them. Far off, in the field, the younger folk were dancing merrily. As we approached, we heard sobbing from one or two women, and loud curses from the men.

"What's amiss?" said Mr. Halifax.

We extracted the news brought by ragged Billy, who on this day had been left in charge of the five dwellings rented of Lord Luxmore. During the owners' absence there had been a distraint for rent; every bit of furniture was carried off; two or three aged and sick folk were left lying on the bare floor—and the poor families here would have to go home to nothing but their four walls.

"Jem!"—and Jem Watkins started, so unusually sharp was his master's tone—"saddle the mare—quick. I shall ride to Kingswell, and thence to the sheriff's."

"God bless 'ee, sir!" sobbed Jacob Baines's widowed daughter-in-law, who had left a sick child to-day at home.

"You will trust me, my men? I will get your goods back to-night, if I can. If not, you hale fellows can rough it, and we'll take the women and children in till morning—can we not, love?" "Oh, readily!" said the mother.

In his absence, we brought the women into the kitchen—the men lit a fire in the farm-yard, and sat sullenly round it.

Muriel persisted in sitting in her usual place, on the door-sill, "waiting" for her father. It was she who first heard the White Gate swing, and told us he was coming. Ursula ran down to the stream to meet him.

When they came up the path, it was not alone—John was helping a lame old woman, and his wife carried in her arms a sick child.

The master was telling the men the results of his journey. It was fruitless. He had found all things at Kingswell as stated. Then he rode to the sheriff's; but Sir Ralph was absent.

"My friends," said the master, "for a few hours you must make up your minds to sit still and bear it. Be patient; we'll lodge you all somehow. To-morrow I will pay your rent—get your goods back—and you shall begin the world again, as my tenants, not Lord Luxmore's."

"Hurrah!" shouted the men, easily satisfied. In a short time the five homeless families were cheerily disposed of—all but Mary Baines and her sick boy.

"What can we do with them?" said John to Ursula.

"I see but one course. We must take him in; his mother says hunger is the chief thing that ails the lad. Come upstairs, Mary Baines."

The next day John was from home, settling the Kingswell affair. The ejected tenants—our tenants now—left us at last, giving a parting cheer for Mr. Halifax, the best master in all England.

Sitting down to tea, John asked his wife after the sick lad.

"He is very ill still, I think. Do you think, John—it was hard to do it when the child is so ill—I ought to have sent them away with the others?"

"Certainly not. If it were anything dangerous, of course Mary Baines would have told us. What are the lad's symptoms?"

As Ursula informed him, I thought he looked serious, but he did not let her see.

"A word from Dr. Jessop will decide all. I will fetch him after tea."

It being a wet night, Mrs. Halifax gathered her boys round the kitchen fire; while out of the dim parlour came "Muriel's voice", as we called the harpsicord. It seemed sweeter than ever this night. Her father sat listening awhile, then went out to fetch the doctor. I followed him down to the stream.

"Phineas," he said, "will you mind and keep the mother and the children downstairs till I come back?"

I promised. "Are you uneasy about Mary Baines's lad?"

"To-day I heard that they have had the smallpox at Kingswell."

I felt a cold shudder. Though vaccination had made it less fatal among the upper classes, this frightful scourge still decimated the poor. Mr. Halifax, who had met and known Dr. Jenner in London, persisted in administering the vaccine virus himself to his children. But still, he had kept them out of all risk of taking the smallpox until now.

"Not a word of this at home, mind. Good-bye."

He walked away, and I returned up the path heavily.

The doctor appeared; he went up to the sick lad; then he and Mr. Halifax were closeted together for a long time. After he was gone, John came into the kitchen, where Ursula sat with Walter on her knee. I saw John's glance at her—and then I feared.

"What does the doctor say? The child will soon be well?"

"We must hope so."

"John, what do you mean? I hear the poor mother upstairs crying."

"She may cry; she has need," said John, bitterly. "She knew it all the while. She never thought of *our* children, but, please God, they are safe. Very few take it after vaccination."

"It—do you mean the smallpox? Has the lad got smallpox? Oh, God help us! My children—my children! She shall quit the house this minute—this very minute," said the mother, with a sort of wildness.

As she rose to leave the room, her husband detained her.

"Ursula, do you know the child is all but dying?"

"Let him die! The wicked woman! She knew it, and she let me bring him among my children!"

"I would she had never come. But what is done, is done. Love, think—if *you* were turned out of doors this bleak, rainy night—with a dying child. This trouble came upon us while we were doing right; let us do right still, and we need not fear. Our children may not take the disease at all. Then, how could we answer it to our conscience if we turned out this poor soul, and *her* child died? Be patient, love; trust in God, and have no fear."

Mary Baines and her children stayed in the house. Next day the little lad died.

From that time, our fears never slumbered. For one whole week we waited, watching the children hour by hour; then Muriel sickened.

It was I who had to tell her father, when he came home in the evening.

"Oh, my God! not her! Any but her!" And by that I knew that she was the dearest of all his children.

Edwin and Walter took the disease likewise, though lightly. No one was in absolute danger except Muriel.

But God brought us safe through our time of anguish: He left us every one of our little ones. One November Sunday we once more gathered our flock together in thankfulness and joy. Muriel came downstairs in her father's arms, and lay on the sofa smiling, her small face white and unscarred.

"Does Muriel feel quite well—quite strong and well?" the father and mother both kept saying as they looked at her. She always answered, "Quite well."

CHAPTER IX

"What a comfort! the daylight is lengthening. I think this has been the very dreariest winter I ever knew. Has it not, my little daughter?"

And John placed himself on a corner of my arm-chair, where Muriel always lay curled up at tea-time now (ay, and many hours in the daytime).

"Muriel will be quite strong when the warm weather comes. We have had such a severe winter. Every one of the children has suffered," said the mother.

"I think everyone has," said John. "But my plan will set all to rights. Mrs. Tod will be ready to take us all in. Boys, shall you like going to Enderley?"

"Is it absolutely necessary we should go?" said the mother.

"I think so, unless you will consent to let me go alone."

She shook her head. "What, with those troubles at the mills?"

"They cannot last—let Lord Luxmore do what he will. If we re-let Longfield for this one summer, we shall save enough

to put the mill in thorough repair. If my landlord will not do it, I will; and add a steam-engine too."

The last was a daring scheme, in those days when every innovation was regarded with horror, and improvement and ruin were held synonymous.

Not many weeks after, we removed to Enderley. Muriel brightened up before she had been there many days. She began to throw off her listlessness, and go about with me everywhere.

John was much occupied now, and devoted himself almost wholly to the cloth-mill. Early and late he was there. Very often Muriel and I followed him, and spent whole mornings in the mill meadows. Through them the stream on which the machinery depended was led by various contrivances. We used to stay for hours listening to its murmur. Then the father would come to us and remain a few minutes—fondling Muriel, and telling me how things went on at the mill.

One morning, as we three sat there, on the brickwork of a little bridge, underneath an elm-tree, John suddenly said:

"What is the matter with the stream? Do you notice, Phineas?"

"I have seen it gradually lowering—these two hours. I thought you were drawing off the water."

"Nothing of the kind—I must look after it. Good-bye."

He walked rapidly down the meadows, and went into his mill. Then I saw him retracing his steps, examining the stream. Finally, he walked off towards Luxmore Hall. It was two hours before we saw him again. Then he came towards us, narrowly watching the stream. It had sunk more and more.

He spoke in tones of passion: "Lord Luxmore has turned out of its course the stream that works my mill. I see what it is—I have seen it coming a whole year. He is determined to ruin me!"

John said this in much excitement. He sat down with Muriel on his knee. By and by his spirit rose, as it always did, the heavier it was pressed down.

"Lord Luxmore shall not ruin me! I have thought of a scheme. But first I must speak to my people—I shall have to shorten wages for a time. But it is only temporary. Now, Uncle Phineas, go you home with Muriel. Tell my wife what has occurred—say I will come as soon as I can. But I may have some trouble with my people. She must not alarm herself."

No, the mother never did. To-night she put the children to bed; then came downstairs with her bonnet on. "Will you come with me, Phineas? I am going to the mill."

It was almost dark, and we met no one except a young man, muffled up in a large cloak and a foreign sort of hat.

"Most likely a Catholic. There are a good many hereabouts," said Mrs. Halifax.

The person followed us almost to the mill-gates.

In his empty mill we found the master. Ursula touched his arm before he even saw her.

"Well, love—you know what has happened? I must either stop the mills, or work them by steam."

"Do that, then. Set up your steam-engine."

"And have all the country down upon me for destroying hand labour? Have a new set of Luddites coming to burn my mill, and break my machinery? That is what Lord Luxmore wants. What must those poor people, who will have short work these two months, and after that machinery-work, which they fancy is taking the bread out of their mouths—what must they think of the master? How can I blame them? I was dumb before them to-night, when they said I must take the cost of what I do—they must have bread for their children. But so must I for mine. Lord Luxmore is the cause of all."

Here I heard, out of the shadow behind the loom, a heavy sigh. John and Ursula were too anxious to notice it.

"Could anything be done?" she asked. "Just to keep things going till your steam-engine is ready?"

I found out how they meant to settle the difficulty. Three months of little renunciations—three months of the old narrow way of living—and the poor people at Enderley might have full wages, whether or no there was full work. Then there would be no want, and, above all, no blaming of the master.

"Now," said John, "do what he will, Lord Luxmore cannot do me any harm."

Again that sigh—quite ghostly in the darkness. They heard it likewise this time.

"Who's there?"

"Only I. Mr. Halifax—don't be angry with me."

And the young man whom Ursula had supposed to be a Catholic appeared from behind the loom.

"I do not know you, sir. How came you to enter my mill?"

"I followed Mrs. Halifax. I have often watched her and your children. But you don't remember me."

Yes, when he came underneath the light of the candle, we all recognized the face.

"I am surprised to see you here, Lord Ravenel."

"Hush! I hate the very sound of the name. I would have renounced it long ago, if he would have let me."

"He—do you mean your father?"

The young man assented silently.

"Would not your coming here displease him?" said John.

"It matters not—he is away. He hates me because I am not of his Church."

The mother turned, and spoke to him kindly, asking him if he would go home with us.

He looked exceedingly surprised. "I—you cannot mean it? After Lord Luxmore has done you all this evil?"

"Is that any reason why I should not do good to his son—that is, if I could? Can I?"

"Oh, you could—you could. Let me come and see you and your children."

"Come, and welcome, Lord——"

"No—not that name. Call me as they used to call me at St. Omer—Brother Anselmo."

So henceforward "Brother Anselmo" was almost domesticated at Rose Cottage. He said Muriel "made him good"—our child of peace. He would sit gazing on her almost as if she were his guardian angel—his patron saint. And the little maid in her quiet way was very fond of him. He taught her to play on the organ in the empty church close by.

Just at this time her father saw somewhat less of her than usual. He was setting up that wonderful novelty—a steam-engine. He worked early and late, aided by the men he brought with him from Manchester. For it was necessary to keep the secret until the thing was complete.

Summer waned. Enderley was growing dreary, and we began to anticipate the cosy fireside of Longfield.

"The children will all go home looking better; do you not think so, Uncle Phineas? Especially Muriel?"

To that I had to answer with a vague assent; thinking how blind love was—all love save mine, which had a gift for seeing the saddest side of things.

Next day was the one fixed for the trial of the new steam-

engine; which trial being successful, we were to start at once for Longfield.

In front of the mill we found a considerable crowd; for, the time being ripe, Mr. Halifax had made public the fact that he meant to work his looms by steam, the only way in which he could carry on the mill at all. The announcement had been received with great surprise and remarkable quietness, both by his own work-people and all along Enderley valley.

Mr. Halifax crossed the mill-yard, his wife on his arm, entered his mill, and unlocked the door of the room which he had turned into an engine-room, and where, along with the men he had brought from Manchester, he had been busy night and day for this week past in setting up his machinery.

"Your folk be queer 'uns, Mr. Halifax. They say there's six devils inside on her, theer." And the man pointed to the great boiler which had been built up in an outhouse adjoining.

John laughed, but he was much excited. He went over, piece by piece, the complicated but delicate machinery; then stepped back and eyed it with pride.

"If only I have set it up right—if it will but work."

His hands shook—his cheeks were burning. He found some slight fault with the machinery, and while the workmen rectified it stood watching them, breathless with anxiety. His wife came to his side.

"Don't speak to me—don't, Ursula. If it fails, I am ruined."

"John!" She just whispered his name. Her fingers closed round his. Her husband faintly smiled.

"Here!" He unlocked the door, and called to the people outside. "Come in, two of you fellows, and see how my devils work. Now then—ready?"

He opened the valve. The steam came rushing into the cylinder. There was a slight motion of the piston-rod.

"All's right! it will work?"

No, it stopped. John drew a deep breath.

It went on again, beginning to move slowly up and down, like the strong arm of some automaton giant. Greater and lesser cog-wheels caught up the motive power. Of a sudden a soul had been put into that wonderful creature of man's making. The monster was alive! Speechless, John stood watching it.

"You said you could do it, and you have done it," cried his wife, her eyes glowing. John murmured, "Yes, thank God!"

Then he opened the door, and let all the people in to see the wondrous sight. They crowded in, staring in blank wonder. John took pains to explain the machinery, stage by stage. They listened open-mouthed, but keeping at a respectful distance from the iron-armed monster, that went working, working on, as if ready and able to work on to everlasting.

John took his wife and children out into the open air. There was now nothing to be done but to hasten to our Longfield.

Waiting for the post-chaise, Mrs. Halifax and the boys sat down on the bridge over the silenced water-fall. John was looking at the horseman riding towards us along the high-road. "I do believe that is Lord Luxmore. I wonder whether he has heard of my steam-engine."

Lord Luxmore came up, and, in passing, bowed. Mrs. Halifax returned it, haughtily. But at the moment a cheer broke out from the mill hard by: "Hurrah for the master!"

Lord Luxmore turned to his tenant. "What is that rather harsh noise I hear, Mr. Halifax?"

"It is my men cheering me."

"Oh, how charming! *Why* do they cheer you, may I ask?"

John briefly told him, speaking with perfect courtesy.

"And this steam-engine will greatly advantage your mills?"

"It will, my lord. It renders me quite independent of your stream."

John was walking by the horse's side, as Lord Luxmore had politely requested him. They went a little way up the hill together, out of sight of Mrs. Halifax.

"I did not quite understand. Would you do me the favour to repeat your sentence?"

"Merely, my lord, that your cutting off of the water-course has been to me one of the greatest advantages I ever had in my life; for which, whether meant or not, allow me to thank you."

The earl looked full in John's face, without answering; then spurred his horse violently. The animal started off, full speed.

"The children. Good God—the children!"

Guy was in the ditch-bank, gathering flowers. But Muriel stood in the horse's path—the helpless, blind child. The next instant she was knocked down.

I never heard a curse on John Halifax's lips but that once. Lord Luxmore heard it too. The image of the frantic father, snatching up his darling from under the horse's heels must

have haunted the earl's good memory for many a day. He dismounted, saying anxiously, "I hope the little girl is not injured? It was accident—you see—pure accident."

But John did not hear. He knelt with the child in his arms by a little runnel in the ditch-bank. When the water touched her she opened her eyes. "I am not hurt, dear father."

Lord Luxmore, standing by, seemed much relieved, and again pressed his apologies. No answer.

"Go away," sobbed out Guy, shaking both his fists in the nobleman's face. Lord Luxmore laughed at the boy's fury, and rode placidly away.

But the father was wholly occupied in Muriel—feeling her little limbs, to make sure that in no way she was injured. It appeared not, though the escape seemed almost miraculous.

"Since it is safe over, I think we will not say anything about this to the mother."

But there was no deceiving the mother. The minute we rejoined her she said:

"John, something has happened to Muriel."

Then he told her; making as light of the accident as he could; as, indeed, for the first ten minutes we all believed, until alarmed by the extreme pallor and silence of the child.

Mrs. Halifax sat down by the roadside and bathed Muriel's forehead; but still the little curls lay motionless against the mother's breast—and still, to every question, she only answered "that she was not hurt".

All this while the post-chaise was waiting. "What must be done?" I inquired of Ursula.

"We must go back again to Enderley," she said, decidedly.

So, without any discussion, our plans were tacitly changed—no more was said about going home to Longfield. Everyone felt that the journey was impossible. For Muriel lay, day after day, on her little bed in an upper chamber, or was carried down in the middle of the day by her father, never attempting to move or talk. When we asked her if she felt ill, she always answered, "Oh, no! only so very tired."

"But it is not good for my little girl always to be quiet, and it grieves father."

"Does it?" She roused herself, sat upright, and began to move her limbs, but wearily.

"Now, my darling, let me see how well you can walk."

Muriel slipped to her feet, and tried to cross the room,

catching at table and chairs. At last she began to stagger, and said, half-crying:

"I can't walk, I am so tired. Oh, do take me in your arms, dear father."

Her father took her, looked long in her sightless face, then buried his against her shoulder, saying nothing. But I think in that moment he too saw the long-veiled Hand which, for this year past, I had seen stretched out of the immutable heavens, claiming that which was its own.

Within a week or two the mother gave another child to the household—a little sister to Muriel. Muriel was the first to whom the news was told. Her father told it.

"Muriel is glad, father. Little Maud's birthday will be in the same month as mine."

Muriel faded, though slowly. The weather had been so bitterly cold that the mother had forbidden our bringing Muriel to the other side of the house, where she and the baby lay.

One Sunday, when Mrs. Halifax was brought triumphantly to her old place at our dinner-table, and all the boys came pressing about her, she looked round surprised, and asked: "Where is Muriel?"

"She seems to feel this bitter weather a good deal," John said; "and I thought it better she should not come down to dinner."

"No," added Guy dolefully, "sister has not been down to dinner with us for a great many days."

The mother started; looked first at her husband and then at me. When Mrs. Tod came into the parlour, she rose and put little Maud into her arms.

"Take baby, please, while I go up to see Muriel."

"Don't—now don't, please, Mrs. Halifax," cried earnestly the good woman.

Ursula turned very pale. "They ought to have told me," she muttered; "John, *you must* let me go and see my child."

"Presently—presently. You shall go upstairs in one minute, my darling wife!"

He turned us all out of the room, and shut the door. How he told her that which was necessary she should know—that which Dr. Jessop himself had told us—how the father and mother had borne this first open revelation of their grief—for ever remained unknown.

I was sitting by Muriel's bed when they came upstairs. The darling, hearing the step, cried with a joyful cry, "Mother! it's my mother!"

The mother folded her to her breast. Her self-command, so far as speech went, was miraculous. For her look—but then she knew the child was blind.

"Now," she said, "we must be very happy to-day."

"Oh, yes." Then, in a fond whisper, "Please, I do so want to see my little sister Maud—Maud that is to take my place, and be everybody's darling now."

"Hush, Muriel," said the father hoarsely.

The new baby was carried upstairs proudly, by Mrs. Tod, all the boys following. Quite a levee was held round the bed, where, laid close beside her, her weak hands being guided over the tiny face and form, Muriel first "saw" her little sister. She was greatly pleased.

"How fat she is! And her hair feels so soft. What colour is it? Like mine?"

It was; nearly the same shade. Maud bore, the mother declared, the strongest likeness to Muriel.

"I am so glad. But these?" touching her eyes anxiously.

"No—my darling. Not like you there," was the low answer.

It seems strange now, to remember that Sunday afternoon, and how merry we all were; how we drank tea in the queer bedroom at the top of the house; and how afterwards Muriel went to sleep in the twilight, with baby Maud in her arms.

I remember that peaceful, heavenly hour. Maud broke upon its quietude by her waking and wailing; and Muriel very unwillingly let the little sister go.

"I wish she might stay with me—just this one night; and to-morrow is my birthday. Please, mother, may she stay?"

"We will both stay, my darling. I shall not leave you again."

John and I sat up late together that night. He went upstairs the last thing, and brought down word that mother and children were all sound asleep.

"I think I may leave them until daylight to-morrow. And now, Uncle Phineas, go you to bed, for you look tired."

I went to bed; but all night long I had disturbed dreams. Long before it was light I rose.

John went early to the room upstairs. It was very still. Ursula lay calmly asleep, with baby Maud in her bosom; on her other side, with eyes wide open to the daylight, lay—that

which for more than ten years we had been used to call "blind Muriel". She saw, now.

CHAPTER X

We went home, leaving all that was mortal of our darling sleeping at Enderley, underneath the snows. For twelve years after then, we lived at Longfield.

Let me recall a certain spring evening, when Mrs. Halifax and I were sitting under the walnut tree.

"This is John's time," said Ursula. "Hark! there are the carriage-wheels!"

For Mr. Halifax, a prosperous man now, drove daily to and from his mills in as tasteful an equipage as any of the country gentry.

His wife went down to the stream to meet him, and they came up the field-path together.

Both were changed. She, active still, but settling into fair largeness; he, inclined to a slight stoop, with the hair wearing away off his forehead up to the crown.

He looked round for his children, and asked if the boys and Maud would be home to tea?

"I think Guy and Walter never do come home in time when they go over to the Manor-house."

"They're young—let them enjoy themselves," said the father, smiling. "And you know, love, of all our 'fine' friends there are none you so heartily approve of as the Oldtowers."

These were not of the former race. Good old Sir Ralph had gone to his rest, and Sir Herbert reigned in his stead. The Manor-house family brought several other "county families" to our notice, or us to theirs, when John's fortunes grew rapidly.

"Here come the children."

It was now a mere figure of speech to call them so—these tall lads, who in the dusk looked as man-like as their father. Maud came up, hanging on Edwin's arm. She was more especially "Edwin's girl", and had been so always—this sprightly elf, at once the plague and pet of the family.

Guy sat down beside his mother. With his easy, happy

temper, generous but uncertain, and his showy, brilliant parts, Guy was not nearly so much to be depended on as the grave Edwin, who was already a thorough man of business, and plodded between Enderley Mills and a smaller one which had taken the place of the flour-mill at Norton Bury.

Mrs. Halifax said that it was "time to go in". So the sunset picture outside changed to the home-group within; the mother sitting at her little table; the father beside her. The young folk scattered themselves about the room. Guy and Walter at the window were looking at the moon. Edwin sat, reading hard, his fingers stuck through his hair. Mistress Maud flitted about in all directions, interrupting everything, and doing nothing.

"Love, when I was waiting to-day in Jessop's bank——"

(Ah! that was another change, the passing away of our good doctor and his wife, and his brother and heir turning the old dining-room into a "County Bank".)

"While waiting there I heard of a lady who struck me as likely to be an excellent governess for Maud."

"Indeed!" said Mrs. Halifax, not over-enthusiastically; I at the same time inquiring "who she was?"

"I really did not ask," John answered, smiling. "But of what she is, Jessop gave me first-rate evidence—a good daughter, who teaches anybody's children for any sort of pay, in order to maintain an ailing mother."

"Would she have to live with us?"

"I think so, decidedly."

"Then it can't be. The house will not accommodate her. No, we cannot take in anybody else at Longfield."

"But—we may have to leave Longfield."

"Leave Longfield!" repeated Mrs. Halifax; "surely——" But glancing at her husband, her tone of impatience ceased. "It troubles you, John."

"Yes, the question does trouble me a good deal. Whether now that our children are growing up, and our income is doubling and trebling year by year, we ought to widen our circle of usefulness, or close it up permanently within the quiet bound of little Longfield. Love, which say you?"

"The latter, the latter—because it is far the happiest."

"I am afraid, *not* the latter, because it *is* the happiest. Boys, come and let us talk over the matter. I am afraid, after much serious thought, that we ought to leave Longfield. I have again been over Beechwood Hall. You all remember Beechwood?"

Yes. It was the "great house" at Enderley, just on the slope of the hill, below Rose Cottage. The beech-wood itself was part of its pleasure-ground.

"What say you, children? Would you like living there?"

Each one made his or her comment. Guy's countenance brightened at the notion of "lots of shooting and fishing" about Enderley; and Maud counted on the numerous visitors that would come to John Halifax, Esquire, of Beechwood Hall.

"Neither of which excellent reasons happen to be your father's," said Mrs. Halifax, shortly. But John answered:

"I will tell you, boys, what are my reasons. When I was a young man, I had strongly impressed on my mind the wish to gain influence in the world. I thought I could use it well, better than most men; those can best help the poor who understand the poor. And I can; since, you know, when Uncle Phineas found me, I was——"

"Father," said Guy, flushing scarlet, "we may as well pass over that fact. We are gentlefolks now."

"We always were, my son."

The youth dropped his eyes, colouring now with a different and a holier shame.

"I know that. Please will you go on, father."

"And now," the father continued, "twenty-five years of labour have won for me the position I desired. That is, I might take my place among the men who have lately risen from the people, to guide and help the people—the Cannings, Huskissons, Peels."

"Would you enter Parliament? Sir Herbert said to-day there was nothing you might not attain to if you would give yourself up entirely to politics."

"No, Guy, no. Let me learn to rule in my own valley, among my own people, before I attempt to guide the State. And that brings me back again to the pros and cons about Beechwood Hall."

The reasons were—first, the advantage of the boys themselves. John wished not only to lift himself, but his sons after him; lift them high enough to help on the ever-advancing tide of human improvement, among their own people first, and thence extending outward in the world whithersoever their talents or circumstances might call them.

"I understand," cried the eldest son, "you want to found a family."

"My boy, in thus far only do I wish to 'found a family' as you call it, that our light may shine before men—that we may say plainly unto all that ask us, 'For me and my house, we will serve the Lord'. I believe, with His blessing, that one may 'serve the Lord' as well in wealth as in poverty, in a great house as in a cottage like this. But now—children, you know when I married your mother I had nothing, and she gave up everything for me. I said I would yet make her as high as any lady in the land—in fortune I then meant, thinking it would make her happier; but she and I know now that we never can be happier than we were in the old house at Norton Bury, or in this little Longfield. By making her lady of Beechwood I should double her responsibilities and give her no pleasures half so sweet as those we leave behind. Still, of herself and for herself, my wife shall decide."

Ursula looked up at him; tears stood in her eyes.

"Thank you, John. I have decided. If you wish it, if you think it right, we will leave Longfield and go to Beechwood."

It was early—little past eight o'clock. This was the day of Guy's coming of age. As we gathered round the cosy breakfast-table, Mr. Halifax, laying down his paper, said:—

"This is very ill news. Ten bank failures in the *Gazette* to-day."

"But it will not harm us, father."

"Edwin is always thinking of 'us', and 'our business'," remarked Guy, rather sharply.

"Edwin is scarcely wrong in thinking of 'us', since upon us depend so many," observed the father. "Yet though we are ourselves secure, I trust the losses around us make it the more necessary that we should not parade our good fortune by launching out into any of Guy's magnificences—eh, my boy?"

The youth looked down. Since we came to Beechwood his pleasure-loving temperament had wanted all sorts of improvements on our style of living—fox-hounds, dinner-parties, balls.

"You may call it 'magnificence', or what you choose; but I know I should like to live a little more as our neighbours do—we that are known to be the wealthiest family——"

He stopped abruptly—for the door opened; and Guy had too much good taste and good feeling to discuss our riches before Maud's poor governess—the tall, grave, sad-looking Miss Silver; the same whom John had seen at Mr. Jessop's

bank; and who had been with us four months—ever since we came to Beechwood. Though an admirable person, Miss Silver was one whom the mother found it difficult to get on with. She was scrupulously kind to her; and the governess was as scrupulously exact in all courtesy; still that impassible demeanour—it might be shyness, it might be pride—sometimes, Ursula privately admitted, “fidgeted” her.

To-day was to be a general holiday for both masters and servants; a dinner at the mills; and in the evening something which, though we call it a tea-drinking, began to look like a “ball”. Half the neighbourhood had been invited by the popular Mr. Guy Halifax to celebrate his coming of age.

We all dispersed; Guy and Walter to ride to the Manor-house, Edwin vanishing with his sister, to whom he was giving daily Latin lessons in the schoolroom. John asked me to take a walk on the hill with him.

He walked thoughtfully along to the brow of Enderley Flat. “I do think, Phineas, the country has been running mad this year after speculation. There is sure to come a panic afterwards, and indeed it seems already beginning.”

“But you have not joined in the mania, and the crash cannot harm you? Did I not hear you say that you were not afraid of losing a single penny?”

“Yes—unfortunately,” with a troubled smile.

“John, what do you mean?”

“I mean, that to stand upright while one’s neighbours are falling on all sides is a most trying position. Misfortune makes people unjust. The other day at the sessions I got cold looks enough from my brother magistrates. And—you saw in the *Norton Bury Mercury* that article about ‘grasping plebeian millionaires’—‘wool-spinners, spinning out of their country’s vitals’. That’s meant for me, Phineas. I feel sorry, because of the harm it may do me—especially among working people, who know nothing but what they hear, and believe everything that is told them. They see I thrive and others fail—that my mills are the only cloth-mills in full work, and I have more hands than I can employ. Then they raise the old cry—that my machinery has ruined labour.”

He stopped, gazing down the sunshiny valley—most part of which was already his own property.

“My poor people—they might have known me better! If there was one point I was anxious over in my youth, it was to

keep up through life a name like the Chevalier Bayard—' *Sans peur et sans reproche* '! And so things might be—ought to be. So perhaps they shall be yet, in spite of this calumny."

"How shall you meet it? What shall you do?"

"Nothing. Live it down. Half the wrongs people do to us are through sheer ignorance. We must be patient. '*In your patience possess ye your souls.*'"

He said this, as if carrying out the thread of his own thought. Mine following it, and observing him, involuntarily turned to another passage in our Book of books, about the blessedness of some men, even when reviled and persecuted.

And for all his cares, John Halifax looked like a man who was "blessed". Blessed, and happy too, throughout that day, especially in the midst of the mill-yard dinner. It did one's heart good to hear the cheer that greeted the master, and the young master, who was to-day for the first time presented as such; as the firm henceforward was to be, "Halifax & Son".

And full of smiling satisfaction was the father's look, when in the evening he stood in the midst of his children waiting for "Guy's visitors". A goodly group they made—our young folk; there were no "children" now. Altogether, they were "a fine family", such as any man might rejoice to see growing, or grown up, around him.

A troop of company arrived, and John left me to assume his duty as host. No easy duty; for times were hard, and men's minds troubled. Everyone, except the light-hearted youngsters, looked grave. Many remember this year—1825. Speculations of all kinds sprang up, flourished a little, and dropped away. Then came ruin, of all ranks and classes. This year, the breaking of many established firms, especially bankers, told that the universal crash had just begun.

It was felt even in our retired country neighbourhood, and among our friendly guests this night. They hit upon all sorts of subjects, keeping far aloof from the one which evidently pressed upon all minds—the universal distress abroad, the fear that was knocking at almost every man's door but ours.

The talk fell on our neighbours. Sir Herbert Oldtower was wondering that Lord Luxmore suffered the Hall to drop into decay, and had begun cutting down the pine-woods around it.

"Woods, older than his title by many a century. And the property being entailed, too—actual robbery of the heir! But

I understand anybody may do anything with Lord Ravenel—a mere selfish, cynical, idle voluptuary!”

“Indeed you are mistaken, Sir Herbert!” cried Mr. Jessop of Norton Bury. “He banks with me. Cynical he may be; idle, perhaps—but Lord Ravenel is not the least like his father—is he, Mr. Halifax?”

“I have not seen Lord Ravenel for many years.”

Dancing began. We sat down and looked on.

Guy and his partner sat down beside us. He had turned very pale, and the lad owned to be in some pain: he had twisted his foot that morning in helping Maud and Miss Silver across the ice; but it was a mere trifle.

Then Sir Herbert Oldtower appeared to lead Mrs. Halifax in to supper, and all the guests came thronging round in a buzz of mirthfulness.

Either the warm, hospitable atmosphere, or the general influence of social pleasantness, had for the time being dispelled the cloud. But certainly it was dispelled. The master of the feast looked down two long lines of happy faces—his own as bright as theirs.

Then Sir Herbert, with a loud premise of his right as the oldest friend of our family, tried to obtain silence for the customary speech, prefatory to the customary toast of “Health and prosperity to the heir of Beechwood”. There was great applause and filling of glasses. In the confusion I felt my sleeve touched, and saw leaning towards me the old banker, Mr. Jessop. He held in his hand a newspaper.

“It’s the *London Gazette*. Mr. Halifax gets it three hours before any of us. I may open it? It is important to me. Mrs. Halifax would excuse, eh?”

Of course she would. Especially if she had seen the old man’s look, as his trembling fingers tried to unfold the sheet.

Sir Herbert rose, cleared his throat, and began—

“Ladies and gentlemen, the high esteem——”

Here someone called out: “Mr. Jessop! Look at Mr. Jessop!”

The old man had suddenly sunk back, with a sort of choking groan. But when he saw everyone looking at him, he tried desperately to recover himself.

“’Tis nothing.” Clutching tightly at the paper. “There’s no news in it—none, I assure you.”

But from his agitation it was plain enough that there was news. Edwin caught and read the fatal page—the fatal column.

"W——'s have stopped payment!"

W——'s was a great London house, the favourite banking-house in our country, with which many provincial banks, and Jessop's especially, were widely connected, and would be no one knew how widely involved.

A hush of momentary suspense, as the *Gazette* was passed hurriedly from hand to hand; and then our guests sat looking at one another in breathless fear, or assured dismay. For there was not a single household of that little company upon whom the blow would not fall—except ours.

No polite disguise could gloss over the general consternation.

"There will be a run on Jessop's bank to-morrow," I heard one person saying.

"A run? I suppose so. Then it will be '*Sauve qui peut*'."

"What say you to all this, Mr. Halifax?"

When Sir Herbert called him by his name, Mr. Halifax looked quickly up. It was to see faces angry, sullen, or miserable, all of which, with a vague distrust, seemed instinctively turned upon him.

"Mr. Halifax," said the baronet, "this is an unpleasant breaking-in upon your kindly hospitalities. I suppose, through this unpropitious event, each of us must make up our minds to some loss. Let me hope yours will be trifling."

John made no answer.

"Or, perhaps—though I can hardly hope anything so fortunate—perhaps this failure will not affect you at all?"

He waited—as did many others, for Mr. Halifax's reply, which was long in coming. However, it did come at last; but grave and sad:

"No, Sir Herbert; it will not affect me at all."

Sir Herbert, and not he alone—looked surprised. Some mutters there were of "congratulation". Then arose a troubled murmur of talking, in which the master of the house was forgotten; until the baronet said, "My friends, I think we are forgetting our courtesy. Allow me to give you without more delay—the toast I was about to propose, 'Health, long life, and happiness to Mr. Guy Halifax'."

And so poor Guy's birthday toast was drunk; almost in silence. Everyone rose from table, and the festivities were over. One by one all our guests began to make excuse. Formal congratulations, brusque adieux, hasty departures; all these

things John had to meet and to bear. At last he was left by his own hearth, quite alone.

The household had gone to bed; there was no one in the study but me. John came in and stood leaning against the fireplace. I saw this night's events had wounded him to the core.

"Ah, Phineas! now I begin to understand what is meant by the curse of prosperity."

It was market-day, and a great crowd was collected before the bank at Norton Bury. It included all classes. Everybody was extremely quiet. All were intent on their own business; on that fast-bolted door, and on the green blind of the windows, which informed them that it was "open from ten till four".

John and I, a little way off, stood looking on. We had driven over to Norton Bury at an early hour. He did not tell me why, but it was not difficult to guess. Not difficult to perceive how strongly he was interested, even affected, by the sight of that crowd. "Jessop's bank has such a number of small depositors, and issues so many small notes. He cannot cash above half of them without some notice. If there comes a run, he may have to stop payment this very day; and then, how wide the misery would spread among the poor, God knows."

His eye wandered pitifully over the mass of anxious faces as they turned with a common impulse from the closed bank door to the Abbey clock. Its finger touched the great X—the ten strokes fell leisurely upon the air; then the chimes burst out.

The bank door remained closed. Five whole minutes did that poor, patient crowd wait on the pavement. Then a murmur arose. One or two men hammered at the door; some frightened women, jostled in the press, began to scream.

John could bear it no longer. "Come along," he said. "I must see Jessop—we can get in at the garden door."

Before a large fire, with breakfast untasted, sat Josiah Jessop, the picture of despair.

"Mr. Jessop, my good friend!"

"Oh! it's you, Mr. Halifax? You have not an account to close? You don't hold any notes of mine, do you?" John repeated that he only came as a friend.

"Not the first 'friend' I have received this morning. Sir Herbert and half a dozen more are waiting for me upstairs.

The biggest fish must have the first bite, eh? Hark! those people outside will hammer my door down! Heaven help me!"

John sat down beside Mr. Jessop. "Tell me, if you have no objection to give me this confidence, exactly how your affairs stand."

The banker obeyed. It seemed that great as was his loss by W——'s failure, it was not absolute ruin to him. In effect, he was at this moment perfectly solvent, and by calling in mortgages, &c., could meet both the accounts of the gentry who banked with him, together with all his own notes now afloat in the country, principally among the humbler ranks, if only both classes of customers would give him time to pay them.

"But they will not. There will be a run upon the bank, and then all's over with me. If only I had a week's time. As it is, I must stop payment to-day. Hark! they are at the door again! Mr. Halifax, for God's sake, quiet them!"

"I will; only tell me first what sum, added to the cash you have available, would keep the bank open—just for a day or two."

The old man began to calculate, and soon stated the sum he needed; I think it was three or four thousand pounds.

"Very well; I have thought of a plan. But first—those poor fellows outside. Thank Heaven, I am a rich man, and everybody knows it."

Soon a notice, signed by Josiah Jessop, and afterwards by himself, to the effect that the bank would open, "without fail", at one o'clock this day, was given by John to the clerk, to be posted in the window.

A responsive cheer showed how readily those outside had caught at this gleam of hope. Also—how implicitly they trusted in the name of a gentleman who all over the country was known for "his word being as good as his bond"—John Halifax.

The banker breathed freer; but an imperative message came from the gentlemen above-stairs, desiring his presence. He looked towards John.

"Let me go in your stead. You can trust me to manage matters to the best of my power?"

The banker overwhelmed him with gratitude.

John came out in half an hour, with a cheerful countenance; told me he was going over to Coltham—would I wait his return?

"And all is settled?" I asked.

"Will be soon, I trust. Good-bye."

I thought the best I could do was to pass the time wandering up and down the garden. As it neared one o'clock, I went into the deserted office, and ensconced myself behind the bank blinds.

The crowd had scarcely moved. On its verge, waiting in a curriole, was a gentleman, who seemed observing it with lazy curiosity. His face, that of a man about thirty, was thin, with an expression at once cynical and melancholy. He looked carelessly out on the scene before him, as if he had no interest therein—as if there was nothing in life worth living for.

The sky had gloomed over, and snow began to fall. Those on the pavement kept turning every minute to the Abbey clock. At length some determined hand again battered at the door. I heard a clerk speaking out of the first-floor window.

"Gentlemen, in five minutes the bank will——"

The rest of the speech was lost. Dashing round the street corner came our Beechwood carriage. Mr. Halifax leaped out.

Well might the crowd divide for him—well might they cheer him. For he carried a canvas bag—a precious bag, with the consolation—perhaps the life—of hundreds in it!

The bank door flew open. The crowd came pushing in; but when John called out to them, "Good people, pray let me pass!" they suffered him to go in first. He went right up to the desk, behind which stood the old banker.

"Mr. Jessop," John said, in a loud voice, that all might hear him, "I have the pleasure to open an account with you. I feel satisfied that in these dangerous times no credit is more safe than yours. Allow me to pay in to-day the sum of five thousand pounds."

"Five thousand pounds!" The rumour of it was repeated from mouth to mouth. In a small provincial bank, such a sum seemed unlimited. It gave universal confidence. All were satisfied—the run upon the bank ceased.

After the first murmur of surprise and pleasure no one seemed to take any notice of Mr. Halifax, or of what he had done. Only one old widow woman dropped him a curtsy in passing by.

"It's your doing, Mr. Halifax. The Lord reward you, sir."

"Thank you," he said, and shook her by the hand. One person more, standing by, addressed him by name. "This is

indeed your doing, and an act of benevolence which I believe no man alive would have done, except Mr. Halifax."

And the gentleman who spoke—the same I had seen in his curricule—held out a friendly hand.

"I see you do not remember me. My name is Ravenel."

"Lord Ravenel!"

We all three began to converse together. While he talked, something of the old "Anselmo" came back into Lord Ravenel's face: especially when John asked him if he would drive over with us to Enderley.

"Enderley—how strange the word sounds!" He drew his hand across his eyes. "Yes, I think I will go back with you to Enderley. But first I must speak to Mr. Jessop here."

It was about some poor Catholic families, who, we learnt, had long been his pensioners.

"You are a Catholic still then?" I asked.

"If you take Catholic in its original sense, certainly. I believe everything—and nothing. Let us change the subject." His manner altered, as he inquired after Mrs. Halifax and the children. "No longer children now, I suppose?"

"Scarcely. Guy and Walter are as tall as yourself; and my daughter——"

"Your daughter?"—with a start—"Oh, yes, I recollect. Baby Maud. Is she at all like—like——" "No."

Neither said more than this; but it seemed as if their hearts warmed to one another, knitted by the same tender remembrance. So we drove home, across the moors to Beechwood.

CHAPTER XI

For several weeks after, the family were in the habit of gathering every evening in John's study. For poor Guy was a captive. The "mere trifle" had turned out to be a sprained foot, which became serious. He bore his imprisonment restlessly enough at first, but afterwards began to interest himself in the pursuits of his sister Maud, who every morning had her lessons in the study.

Of evenings, as now, Miss Silver always made one of the "young people", who were generally grouped together round

Guy's sofa. The father and mother sat opposite—as usual, side by side. At intervals, flashes of talk or laughter broke out, chiefly from Guy, Walter, or Maud, when Edwin would look up from his book, and even the grave governess relax into a smile. Guy leant back upon his sofa, shading off the fire with his hand, and from behind it gazing with a curious intentness at the young governess.

"Guy," said his mother (and Guy started), "what were you thinking about?"

"Oh, nothing; that is——" here, by some accident, Miss Silver quitted the room. "Mother, come over here, I want your opinion."

It was with some hesitation that he brought out the question, namely, that it was Miss Silver's birthday to-day; that he thought we ought to give her some trifle as a present.

"And I was considering this large 'Flora' I ordered from London; she would like it extremely: she is so fond of botany."

"What do you know about botany?" said Edwin sharply.

Guy vouchsafed no answer to his brother. "Father, don't you think she would like it? Then, suppose you give it to her?"

At this moment Miss Silver returned.

"We were just talking about you, Miss Silver. My son hopes you will accept this book from him, and from us all, with all kind birthday wishes." And, rising, Mrs. Halifax touched the girl's forehead with her lips, and gave her the present. Miss Silver coloured, and drew back. "You are very good, but indeed, I would much rather not have it."

"Why so? Do you dislike gifts, or this gift in particular?"

"Oh, no; certainly not."

"Then," said John, as he came forward and shook hands with her with an air of hearty kindness, "pray take the book. Guy, write her name in it at once."

Guy willingly obeyed; his mother looked over his shoulder.

"Louisa Eugénie—how did you know that, Guy? Louisa Eugénie Sil—is that your name, my dear?"

The question seemed to throw the governess into much confusion. At last she drew herself up.

"No—I will not deceive you any longer. My right name is Louisa Eugénie d'Argent."

Mrs. Halifax started. "Are you a Frenchwoman?"

"On my father's side—yes."

"Why did you not tell me so?"

"Because, if you remember, at our first interview, you said no Frenchwoman should educate your daughter. And I was homeless—friendless. You never asked me of my parentage."

"Why did you renounce your father's name?" said John.

"Because English people would have scouted my father's daughter. Everybody knew him—he was D'Argent the Jacobin—D'Argent the Bonnet Rouge."

She threw out these words defiantly, and quitted the room.

"This is a dreadful discovery. Edwin, you have seen most of her—did you ever imagine——"

"I knew it, mother," said Edwin. "After all, French or English, it makes no difference."

"I should think not, indeed!" cried Guy angrily.

"Hush!" said the father, with a glance at Maud, who, with wide-open eyes, in which the tears were just springing, had been listening to all these revelations about her governess.

But Maud's tears were soon stopped, as well as this painful conversation, by the entrance of our daily, or rather nightly, visitor, Lord Ravenel. The boys began to talk to Lord Ravenel; and Maud took her place on a footstool beside him. From the first sight she had been his favourite, he said, because of her resemblance to Muriel. At his wonted hour he rode away, sighingly contrasting pleasant Beechwood with solitary Luxmore.

After his departure Maud vanished; the younger boys also. Guy settled himself on his sofa. His mother began putting things in order before retiring. John sat in the arm-chair—meditative. She asked him what he was thinking about.

"About that man, Jacques d'Argent."

"You have heard of him, then?"

"Few had not, twenty years ago. He was one of the most 'blatant beasts' of the Reign of Terror. A fellow without honesty, conscience, or even common decency."

"And that man's daughter we have had in our house, teaching our innocent child!"

Alarm and disgust were written on every feature of the mother's face. If Mrs. Halifax had a weak point, it was her prejudice against anything French or Jacobinical.

"Love, try and be calmer. A girl, who, whatever may have been her antecedents, has lived for six months blamelessly in our house."

"Would to Heaven she had never entered it! But it is not too late. She shall leave, immediately."

"Mother!" burst out Guy. "Mother, you are unjust, heartless, cruel. She shall *not* leave; she shall *not*, I say!"

"Guy, how dare you speak to your mother in that way? How could you wound your mother so?"

"I did not mean to wound her," the lad answered. "I only wished to prevent her from being unjust and unkind to one to whom she must show all justice and kindness. One whom I respect, esteem—whom I *love*! Yes, mother! Yes, father! I love her. I intend to marry her."

Guy said this with an air of quiet determination. A great change had come over him. From the boy he had suddenly started up into the man; and his parents saw it. The father was the first to speak.

"All this is very sudden. Is Miss Silver—is the lady aware of it?" "No."

The mother sat motionless, never uttering a sound. Suddenly, hearing a footstep and a light knock at the door, she darted forward and locked it, crying: "No admittance! Go away."

A note was pushed in under the door. It was merely a line, stating Miss Silver's wish to leave Beechwood immediately; signed with her right name—"Louisa Eugénie d'Argent." A postscript added: "Your silence I shall take as permission to depart; and shall be gone early to-morrow."

"To-morrow! Gone to-morrow! And she does not even know that—that I love her. Mother, you have ruined my happiness. I will never forgive you—never!"

Never forgive his mother! No marvel that even her husband's clasp could not remove the look of suffering which settled down in Ursula's face, as she watched her boy—storming about, furious with uncontrollable passion and pain. At last, mother-like, she forgot the passion in pity of the pain.

"You must keep quiet, or you will be ill. Come, sit down—here, beside your mother."

She was obeyed. "Oh mother, mother, forgive me! I am so miserable!"

He laid his head on her shoulder. She kissed and clasped him close. After a while she said, "Father, tell Guy that we forgive his being angry; that perhaps some day——"

"Some day," John continued, "Guy will find out that we can have nothing in the world—except our children's good—so dear to us as their happiness."

Guy looked up, beaming with hope and joy. "Oh, father! Oh, mother! will you, indeed——"

"We will indeed say nothing," the father answered, smiling, "until to-morrow. Then we will all three talk the matter quietly over, and see what can be done."

Late that night Mrs. Halifax came into my room.

"Phineas, you are always up first in the morning. Will you give a message from us to—Maud's governess?"

"Yes. What shall I say?"

"Merely, that we request she will not leave Beechwood until we have seen her. We have been sitting talking in Guy's room. His father thought it would be better."

"And is all settled?"

"Yes. John thinks it ought to be. At least, that she should know the feeling with which Guy regards her. If, after a year, it still remains, and he is content to begin life on a small income, we have given our consent to our son's marriage. John esteems her—John likes her. For me—oh, I shall make a capital—what is it?—a capital *mother-in-law*—in time!"

Early in the morning I met Miss Silver in the hall, bonneted and shawled, carrying down a portion of her chattels. She evidently contemplated an immediate departure. It was with the greatest difficulty that I could persuade her to change her determination. She would scarcely listen to a word. She was in extreme agitation; half a dozen times she insisted on leaving, and then sat down again. At the opening of the study door the blushes rose up to her forehead in one involuntary tide.

It was only Edwin. He looked surprised at seeing me with Miss Silver.

"What is that box? She is not going?"

"No; I have been entreating her not. Add your persuasions, Edwin."

For Edwin, with all his quietness, was a lad of great influence, and no little penetration. I felt inclined to believe that though as yet he had not been let into the secret of last night, he guessed it pretty well already. He might have done, by the peculiar manner in which he went up to the governess and took her hand.

"Pray stay; I beg of you."

She made no more ado, but stayed. I left her with Edwin, and took my usual morning walk till breakfast-time.

A strange breakfast it was. Guy was happily absent. The rest of us kept up a fragmentary, awkward conversation. Miss Silver was, to my astonishment, mild and meek, on the very verge of the melting mood. And when, the breakfast-table being quickly deserted, she, sitting absently in her place, was gently touched by Mrs. Halifax, she started up, with the same vivid rush of colour that I had before noticed.

"My dear, will you come with me into the study? We will have a little chat with my son. Uncle Phineas, you'll come? Will you come too, my dear?"

"If you wish it." And with an air of unwonted obedience, she followed Mrs. Halifax.

Poor Guy! confused young lover! I really felt sorry for him! Mrs. Halifax scarcely spoke a word. At length, when Miss Silver referred to "lessons", she said:

"Not yet. I want Maud for half an hour. Will you be so kind as to take my place, and sit with my son the while?"

"Oh, certainly."

For Guy's sake this must be got over—the quicker the better. His mother rose, kissed him—then slowly walked out of the study. I followed. Outside the door we parted.

Half an hour afterwards, coming in from the garden, I met her standing in the hall. She waited, listening.

"It is very strange. He promised to come to tell me—hark! was that the study door?"

One minute more, and the young lover entered—his bitter tidings written on his face.

"She has refused me, mother. I never shall be happy more."

Poor Guy!—I slipped out of his sight, and left the lad alone with his mother.

I saw nothing more of anyone until tea-time: when Mrs. Halifax and the governess came in together—one being subdued and gentle, the other tender and kind. Both, however, were exceedingly grave.

Neither Guy, nor Edwin, nor the father were present. When John's voice was heard in the hall, Miss Silver had just risen to retire with Maud.

"Good-night, for I shall not come downstairs again," she said hastily.

"Good-night," the mother answered—rose, kissed her, and let her go.

When Edwin and his father appeared, they too looked re-

markedly grave. Supper passed in silence, and then Edwin took up his candle to go to bed.

His father called him back. "Edwin, you will remember?"

"I will, father."

"Something is amiss with Edwin," said his mother, when the two younger boys had closed the door behind them.

John, making her sit down by him, but turning a little from her, bade her tell him all that had happened to-day. A few words explained the history of Guy's rejection and its cause.

"She loves someone else. When I—as his mother—went and asked her the question, she confessed this."

"Did she tell you who he—this lover, was?"

"No. She said she could not, until he gave her permission. That whether they would ever be married she did not know. She knew nothing, save that he was good and kind, and the only creature in the world who had ever cared for her."

"Poor girl!"

"John!"—startled by his manner—"you have something to tell me? You know who this is—this man who has stood between my son and his happiness?"

"Yes, I do know. Love, it is a great misfortune, but it is no one's blame—neither ours, nor theirs—they never thought of Guy's loving her. He says so—Edwin himself."

"Is it Edwin?" in a cry as if her heart was breaking. "His very own brother! Oh, my poor Guy! Brother will be set against brother! They will never feel like brothers—never again. Both my noble boys! to be made miserable for that girl's sake! Oh! that she had never been born."

"Nay. Remember—she will be Edwin's wife."

"Never!" cried the mother. "Guy is the eldest. His brother has acted meanly. So has she. No, John, I will *not* allow it."

"Ursula—you forget—they love one another."

This one fact appeared to force itself upon Mrs. Halifax's mind. Her passion subsided. John told her, in few words, all that Edwin had that day confessed to his father; how these two, being much together, had become attached to one another. Absorbed in this love—which, Edwin solemnly declared, was never openly confessed till this morning—they neither of them thought of Guy. And thus things had befallen.

"Guy does not know. He need not know just yet—not till he is stronger. Surely, Edwin will not tell him?"

"No; he promised me he would not. There is no fear."

But she began straining her ears to catch the least noise in the boys' rooms overhead. Guy and Walter shared one; Edwin had his to himself.

"They surely will not meet. Yet Guy sometimes likes sitting over Edwin's fire. Hark! I am sure they are talking. John, you said Edwin promised?" "Faithfully promised."

"But if, by some accident, Guy found out? Hark! they are talking very loud. That is a chair fallen. Oh, John! My boys—my boys." And she ran upstairs in an agony.

What a sight for a mother's eyes! Two brothers struggling together like Cain and Abel, fury in their faces.

The father came and parted them. "Boys, are you gone mad? Shame, Guy! Edwin, I trusted you."

"I could not help it, father. He had no right to steal into my room; no right to snatch her letter from me."

"It was her letter, then?" cried Guy, furiously.

Edwin made no answer; but held out his hand for the letter. Guy took no heed.

"Give it me back, Guy; I warn you. She is mine."

"Yours?" Guy laughed in his face.

"Yes, mine. Ask my father—ask my mother. They know."

"Mother!" The letter fell from the poor lad's hand.

"Mother, it isn't true?"

She turned from him—ah, poor Guy!

"Edwin, is it my brother Edwin? Who would have thought it?" Half-bewildered, he looked from one to the other of us all; but no one spoke. Edwin stooped in a sorrowful and humble way to pick up his betrothed's letter. Then Guy flew at him, and caught him by the collar.

"You coward!—how dared you? No, I won't hurt him; she is fond of him. Go away, every one of you. Oh, mother, mother, mother!"

He fell on her neck, sobbing. She gathered him in her arms, and so we left them.

John and I sat over the study fire till long after midnight.

"What is to be done with Guy?"

"God knows," John answered. But his tone expressed a meaning different from that generally conveyed in the words.

Next morning Guy broke into a passion of misery. "Uncle Phineas, I was fond of Edwin—I was indeed—but now it seems sometimes as if I *hated* him. Oh, if it had been a stranger and not he! If it had been anyone in the world except my brother!"

After a time he recovered himself, and came down with me to breakfast, as he had insisted upon doing; met them all, even Miss Silver—and Edwin.

Breakfast being over, the parents talked together, trying to arrange some plan whereby Guy's mind might be occupied and soothed, or else Edwin removed out of his sight for a little while.

When by a happy chance there came over that morning our good friend Lady Oldtower, Mrs. Halifax communicated, with a simple dignity, the fact of "my son Edwin's engagement", and accepted the invitation for Maud and Miss Silver, which was pressed.

One thing I noticed, that in speaking of or to the girl who in a single day from merely the governess had become, and was treated as, our own, Mrs. Halifax invariably called her "Miss Silver", or "my dear"; never "Louise".

Before she left Beechwood, Edwin led to his mother his happy, affianced wife. Happiness melts some natures, like spring and sunshine. Louise looked up with swimming eyes.

"Oh! be kind to me! Nobody was ever kind to me till I came here!"

The good heart gave way: Mrs. Halifax opened her arms. "Be true to Edwin—love Edwin, and I shall love you."

Edwin hurried Louise away. Guy was left alone with me and his mother. Mrs. Halifax sat sewing. She seemed to take no notice of his restless starts—his fits of dark musing.

"Mother!" Guy said at last, coming up and leaning against her chair, "you must let me go."

"Where, my son?"

"Anywhere—out of their sight—those two. I cannot bear it. It maddens me—makes me not myself. I wouldn't harm Edwin—would not take from him his happiness; but to live in sight of it day after day—I can't do it! Let me get away."

"But where?"

"Anywhere, as I said; only let me go far away from them."

Guy's instinct of flight was, his mother felt, safest, best.

"My boy, you shall have your desire; you shall go."

Some time after John's hour for returning from the mills, I found that everything was settled for Guy's immediate departure. There was some business in Spain which his father made the ostensible reason for the journey. It was settled that he should go, as he pleaded, this very day.

A strange day it seemed—long and yet how short! I can call to mind seeing Guy and his mother everywhere side by side, as if grudging each instant remaining till the final instant came.

All the household collected in the hall to bid Mr. Guy good-bye. They lingered about him, with eager, honest blessings. Finally, Guy, his father, and his mother went into the study by themselves. Soon even his father came out and shut the door, that there should not be a single witness to the last few words between mother and son. These being over, they both came into the hall together, brave and calm—which calmness was maintained even to the last good-bye.

Thus we sent our Guy away, cheerfully and with blessings, with no guard or restraint, except the fear of God, his father's counsels, and his mother's prayers.

CHAPTER XII

Two years rolled over Beechwood. The last of the children ceased to be a child; and we prepared for the first marriage in the family.

Guy still remained abroad; his going had produced the happy result intended. The family wound was closing, the family peace about to be restored. I was glad to have seen many of John's cares laid to rest, more especially those external troubles which I have not lately referred to. He had lived down all slanders, as he said he would. He had faith in the universal victory of Truth; and Truth conquered at last.

One day before Edwin's wedding Mrs. Halifax was remarkably gay. She had had letters from Guy in Paris; together with a lovely present—a white embroidered shawl. It had arrived this morning—Lord Ravenel being the bearer. This was not the first time that he had brought us news of our Guy.

Mrs. Halifax, in casual inquiry, asked after the health of Lord Luxmore.

"He is still at Compiègne. Does not Guy mention him? Lord Luxmore takes the greatest pleasure in Guy's society."

This was evidently new and not welcome tidings to Guy's mother. What Lord Ravenel had said about Guy's association with Lord Luxmore was recalled to me the day after, by the

mother's anxious face, as she gave me a foreign letter to post. I saw it was to her son, at Paris.

"It will be the last letter I shall need to write. My boy is coming home."

"Guy coming home! To the marriage?"

"No; but immediately after. He is quite himself now. He longs to come home."

None could have desired a brighter marriage-morning. Sunshine out of doors—sunshine on all the faces within; only family faces, for no other guests had been invited. John disliked a show-wedding. It was with some surprise that Maud and I, standing at the hall-door, saw Lord Ravenel's travelling carriage drive up to it, and Lord Ravenel himself spring out. Maud took the unexpected guest to the study, and left him there with her father.

I came into the drawing-room, and sat watching the faces, all as bright as bright could be, including the mother's. She stood smoothing down the folds of her beautiful shawl.

"John, is that you? How softly you came in. And Lord Ravenel! He knows we are glad to see him. Shall we take him with us to see Edwin married?" Lord Ravenel bowed.

"Maud tells us you have not seen Guy. We fully expect him to-morrow."

Lord Ravenel bowed again. Mrs. Halifax said something about this unexpected arrival of his.

"He came on business," John answered quickly, and Ursula made no more inquiries.

John called me aside. I followed him to the study. By his look I knew in a moment that something had happened.

"Phineas, I want you to stay away from church; make some excuse, or I will for you. Write a letter for me to this address in Paris. Say—Guy Halifax's father will be there, without fail, within a week, to answer all demands."

"All demands!" I echoed, bewildered.

He repeated the sentence. "Can you remember it? And post it at once, before we return from church. You will be very careful, Phineas? *She must not know*—not till to-night." And Guy's father was gone.

I rejoined the rest, made my excuses, and watched the marriage-party leave the house. I then wrote the letter and sent it off. That done, I went back into the study, until I heard the church bells ring out merrily. The marriage was over.

I was just in time to meet them at the front gates—our Edwin and his wife. All the village escorted the young couple home. John stood on the hall-steps—thanked his people, and bade them to the general rejoicing.

At the marriage-breakfast Mr. Halifax kept the same calm demeanour. He drank the marriage-health; he gave Edwin and Louise a marriage-blessing. Finally, he sent them away.

"It reminds one of Guy's leaving," said the mother. "John, do you think it possible the boy can be home to-night?"

John answered very softly, "No. Lord Ravenel brought me a letter from Guy this morning."

"A letter from Guy—and you never told me. How very strange!"

We were all still standing at the hall-door. Unresisting, she suffered her husband to bring her into the study.

"Now—the letter, please! The letter, John?"

The letter, which I saw afterwards, was thus:—

"DEAR FATHER AND MOTHER,

"I have disgraced you all. I have been drunk—in a gaming-house. A man insulted me—it was about my father. I struck him—there was something in my hand, and—the man was hurt. He may be dead by this time. I don't know.

"I am away to America to-night. I shall never come home any more. God bless you all.

"GUY HALIFAX.

"P.S.—I got my mother's letter to-day. Mother—I was not in my right senses, or I should not have done it. Mother, darling! forget me. Don't let me have broken your heart."

This was the end of Edwin's wedding-day.

Lord Ravenel knew the whole story, though he had not seen Guy. The lad was hurried off immediately, for fear of justice; but he had written from shipboard to Lord Ravenel, begging him himself to take the letter and break the news to us.

Mr. Halifax and Lord Ravenel went to Paris together, not only to meet justice, but to track the boy—to whose destination we had no clue but the wide world, America. Guy's mother hurried them away.

Then followed a long season of gloom, during which we,

living shut up at Beechwood, knew that John's stainless, honourable name was parroted abroad in every society.

At last John fixed the day of his coming back. All that had to be told about Guy—and it was better news than any one of us had hoped for—John had already told in his letters. When he came back, therefore, he was burthened with no trouble undisclosed. He had paid all his son's debts; he had, as far as possible, saved his good name; he had made a safe home for the lad, and heard of his safely reaching it, in the New World. Nothing more was left but to hope that time would blot out the shame. That since Guy's hand was clear of blood, men's minds would gradually lose the impression of a deed committed in heat of youth, and repented of with such bitter atonement.

Seven years had passed since we saw Guy's merry face. Yet still there was no hint of his coming home. He was contented and prosperous in the western world, leading an active and useful life, earning an honourable name. He had taken a partner, he told us; and they were doing well.

Time went on placidly. The father and mother changed into grandfather and grandmother, and little Maud into Auntie Maud. The first break in our repose came early in the new year. There had been no Christmas letter from Guy, and he never once had missed writing home at Christmas. The usual monthly mail came in, and no word from him—a second month, and yet nothing.

Gradually, his mother's cheek grew paler, and his father more anxious-eyed. We had written, as usual, by every mail. By the last—by the March mail, I saw that in addition to the usual packet for Mr. Guy Halifax—his father had written in business form to "Messrs. Guy Halifax & Co."

In May there came in the American mail. It brought all our letters of this year sent back again, directed in a strange hand, to "John Halifax, Esquire, Beechwood," with the annotation, "By Mr. Guy Halifax's desire." Among the rest was one that explained the reason they were thus returned. It was a few lines from Guy himself, stating that unexpected good fortune had made him determined to come home at once. If circumstances thwarted this intention, he would write without fail; otherwise he should most likely sail by an American merchantman—the *Stars-and-Stripes*.

"Then he is coming home! On his way home!"

"The liners are only a month in sailing; but this is a barque most likely, which takes longer time. Love, show me the date of the boy's letter."

It was in *January*!

We all stood mute and panic-struck. John was the first to grasp the unspoken dread, and show that it was less than at first appeared.

"We ought to have had this letter two months ago; this shows how often delays occur. Guy does not say when the ship was to sail—she may be on her voyage still. I can write to Lloyd's and find out everything. Cheer up, mother. Please God, you shall have that boy of yours back before long."

But after that day Mrs. Halifax's strength decayed. Not suddenly, scarcely perceptibly; but there was an evident change. Week by week her long walks shortened; and gradually the domestic surveillance fell into the hands of Maud.

An answer arrived from Lloyd's: the *Stars-and-Stripes* was an American vessel, probably of small importance, for the underwriters knew nothing of it.

More delay—more suspense. The summer days came—but not Guy. No news of him—not a word. His father wrote to America—pursuing inquiries in all directions. At last some tangible clue was caught. The *Stars-and-Stripes* had sailed, had been spoken with about the Windward Isles—and never heard of afterwards.

Then came week after week—I know not how they went by. The mother's heart was breaking. She made no moan, but we saw it in her face. One morning she was absent from breakfast and dinner; she had not slept well, and was too tired to rise. Many days following it happened the same. How we missed her about the house!

It was the middle of July. One night Maud and I sat in the study by ourselves. The father spent all his evenings upstairs now, by his wife's bedside. Maud and I sat in silence, silence so deep that the maid's opening the door made us both start.

"Miss Halifax—there's a gentleman wanting to see Miss Halifax."

Maud sprang up in her chair. "Show the gentleman in."

He stood already in the doorway—tall, brown, bearded. Maud just glanced at him, then rose, bending stiffly.

"Will you be seated? My father——"

"Maud, don't you know me? Where's my mother? I am Guy."

CHAPTER XIII

Guy and his mother were together. She had had him with her for two whole days.

He had suffered much; had gone through poverty, labour, sickness, shipwreck. He had been cast away, picked up by an outward-bound ship—and finally landed in England, he and his partner, as penniless as they left it.

"You must get well now, mother. Promise!"

Her smile promised—and even began the fulfilment of the same.

"I think she looks stronger already. Oh, mother, I will never leave you again—never!"

"No, Guy, no." John came in, and stood watching them both. "No, my son, you must never leave your mother."

"I will not leave either of you, father," said Guy.

With a peculiar trust and tenderness John's heart turned to his eldest son, the heir of his name, his successor at Enderley Mills. Already a plan had been started, that the firm of Halifax & Sons should become Halifax Brothers. Perhaps, ere very long, it would be "Guy Halifax, Esquire, of Beechwood," and "the old people" at happy little Longfield.

That night we gathered, as we never thought we should gather again in this world, round the family table—all changed, yet not one lost. All took their old places, except that the mother lay on her sofa, and Maud presided at the urn.

Early, before anybody thought of moving, John carried his wife upstairs. When he came down he stood talking; a minute or two afterwards he silently left the room. I followed him, and found him leaning against the chimney-piece in his study.

"Who's that?" He spoke feebly; he looked—ghastly! I called him by his name.

"Come in. Fetch no one. Shut the door." I obeyed.

"Phineas," he said, holding out a hand; "don't mind. I shall be better presently. I know what it is—oh, my God!"

Sharp, horrible pain—such as makes poor mortal flesh cry

out in its agony to its Maker; I know now what he must have endured.

He held me fast, lest I should summon help. After a few minutes the worst suffering abated, and he sat down. I got some water; he drank, and let me bathe his face with it. A few heavy sighs, gasped as if it were for life, and he was himself again.

"John, what is it?"

He paused, as if undetermined whether or not to tell me; then said: "Do you remember how your father died? I have often thought what a happy death it was—painless, instantaneous—his sudden passing from life present to life eternal."

"John, why do you say this to me?"

He looked at me across the table—steadily, as if he would fain impart to my spirit the calmness that was in his own. "I believe, Phineas, that when I die my death will be not unlike your father's. I have known ever since I was in Paris—Dr. K—— told me—that I had the disease I suspected; beyond medical power to cure. It is not immediately fatal; he said I might live many years, even to old age; and I might die, suddenly, at any moment, just as your father died.

He said this gently and quietly; and I listened—I listened. "Phineas!"

I felt the pressure of his warm hand on my shoulder.

"Phineas, we have known one another these forty years. Is our love, our faith, so small, that either of us, for himself or his brother, need be afraid of death?"

"Phineas! no one knows this but you. I almost wish I had not told you at all."

Then—I rose.

At my urgent request, he explained to me the whole truth. It was less terrible when wholly known. It had involved little suffering as yet, the paroxysms being few and rare. They had always occurred when he was alone, or when feeling them coming on he could go away and bear them in solitude.

"She has not the least idea—my wife, I mean. Perhaps I ought to have told her. Often I resolved I would, and then changed my mind. Since she has been ill, I have almost hoped that she would not need to be told at all. I would rather of the two that she went away first. She would suffer less, and it would be such a short parting."

He spoke as one would speak of a new abode, an impending

journey. To him the great change was a thought—solemn indeed, but altogether without fear. —P

“I thought, this attack having been somewhat worse than my last, someone ought to be told. It has been a comfort to me to tell you—a great comfort, Phineas. Always remember that. Now, one thing more, and my mind is at ease. You see, though I may have years of life, I am never sure of a day, and I have to take many precautions. At home I shall be quite safe now. And I rarely go anywhere without having one of my boys with me. Still, for fear—look here.”

He showed me his pocket-book; on a card bearing his name and address was written in his own hand, “*Home, and tell my wife carefully.*”

“Who knows? We may both be old men yet, Phineas. Now, will you come with me to say good-night to the children?”

After the rest had merrily dispersed, John and I stood for a long time in the empty parlour, his hand on my shoulder. What we said I shall not write, but I remember it, every word. And he—I *know* he remembers it still.

The 1st of August, 1834. Many may remember that day; how, in town and country, there was spread abroad a general sense of rejoicing—because honest old England had paid down cheerfully her twenty millions, and in all her colonies the negro was free.

John remained by his wife the whole forenoon—wheeling her about in her garden-chair; taking her to see her school-children—to hear the shouts rising up from the people at the mill-yard. For all Enderley, following the master’s example, took an interest in the Emancipation of the Slaves.

We had our own young people round us, and the day was a glorious day, they declared one and all. After dinner John carried his wife to her chair beside the weeping ash, where she could smell the late hay in the meadow, and hear the ripple of the stream in the beech-wood. Her husband sat on the grass, making her laugh with his quaint sayings.

This last sight—of them sitting under the ash-tree, the sun making still whiter Ursula’s white shawl, and throwing some of their boyish gold-colour into the edges of John’s curls—this picture I see with my shut eyes, vivid as yesterday.

I sat for some time in my room—then John came to fetch me for our walk on the Flat. Almost every evening we used to

spend an hour or more, pacing up and down, or sitting under the brow of the Flat.

John and I sat down together. We talked a little—chiefly of Longfield; how I was to have my old room again—and how a new nursery was to be planned for the grandchildren.

"We shall have Longfield just as full as ever it was, all summer-time. But in winter we'll be quiet, and sit by the chimney-corner, and plunge into my books—eh, Phineas?"

He sat, talking thus, looking out westward—where the sun was about an hour from the horizon.

"Do you remember how we used to lie on the grass in your father's garden? I wonder if they keep the yew-hedge clipped as round as ever."

I told him that some strange tenants were going to make an inn of the old house, and turn the lawn into a bowling-green.

"What a shame! I wish I could prevent it. And yet, perhaps not," he added, after a silence. "Ought we not rather to recognize and submit to the universal law of change? how each in his place is fulfilling his day, and passing away, just as that sun is passing. Only we know not whither he passes; while whither we go we know, and the Way we know—the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever."

Almost before he had done speaking, a troop of our young people came out from Mrs. Tod's cottage, and nodded to us from below. He smiled, looked after them for a minute, and then laid himself quietly down on his back along the slope, his eyes still directed towards the sunset. When the sun shone level upon the place where we were, I saw John pull his broad straw hat over his face, and compose himself, with both hands clasped upon his breast, in the attitude of sleep.

I spoke no more, but threw my cloak over him. He looked up, thanked me silently, with his own familiar smile. I sat half an hour or more watching the sun, which sank steadily.

Maud and Ravenel were coming up the slope. I beckoned them to come softly, not to disturb the father. They and I sat in silence, facing the west. The sun journeyed down to his setting—lower—lower; then—he was gone.

"How cold it has grown," said Maud. "I think we ought to wake my father."

She went up to him, laid her hands upon his, drew back startled—alarmed.

"Father!"

I put the child aside. It was I who moved the hat from John's face—the face—for John himself was far, far away. While he was sleeping thus the Master had called him.

His sons carried him down the slope. They laid him in the upper room in Mrs. Tod's cottage. Then I went home to tell his wife.

She was at last composed, as we thought, lying on her bed. It was ten o'clock at night.

I went out, up to Rose Cottage, to sit by myself, looking at him whom I should not see again for "a little while".

Farewell, John! Farewell, my more than brother! It is but for a little while.

As I sat, someone touched me. It was Mrs. Halifax.

How she had managed to steal out from among her children I do not know. Nor how she, who had not walked for weeks, had found her way up hither, in the dark, all alone. I gave her my place, and she sat down by the bed. It might have been ten minutes or more that she and I remained thus.

"I think I hear someone at the door. Brother, will you call in the children? Children, come in and look at your father."

They all gathered round her—weeping; but she spoke without a single tear. Her eyes grew dreamy.

"Children, we were so happy, you cannot tell. He was so good; he loved me so. Better than that, he made me good; that was why I loved him. And what *he* was—children, no one but me ever knew all his goodness, no one but himself ever knew how dearly I loved your father. Guy, Edwin, all of you, must never forget your father. You must do as he wishes, and live as he lived—in all ways. Children, you will never do anything that need make you ashamed to meet your father."

As they hung round her she kissed them all—her three sons and her daughter; then, her mind being perhaps led astray by the room we were in, looked feebly round for one more child—remembered—smiled—

"How glad her father will be to have her again—his own little Muriel."

"Mother! mother darling! come home," whispered Guy.

"Presently, presently! Now go away, all of you; I want to be left for a little, alone with my husband."

As we went out, I saw her turn towards the bed, "John,

John!" Just a low, low murmur, like a tired child creeping to fond protecting arms.

We closed the door. We all sat on the stairs outside. Within or without—no one spoke—nothing stirred. At last Guy softly went in.

She was still in the same place by the bed-side, but half-lying on the bed. Her arm was round her husband's neck; her face was nestled close to his hair. One of her children called her, but she neither answered nor stirred.

Guy lifted her up, very tenderly; his mother, who had no stay left but him—his mother—a widow——

No, thank God! she was not a widow now.